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FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

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Fantastic **ADVENTURES**



EYE OF THE WORLD

By
Alexander Blade

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All Stories Complete

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THE EYE OF THE WORLD (Two Part Serial—Part One)by Alexander Biede 8

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In the heart of Africa a great jewel glistened in a mountainside—watching—waiting . . .

HAUNTED HOUSE (Short—5,000) by Guy Archette 90

Illustrated by Richard E. Lockie

Haunted houses held no surprise for Gravelon, nor did he fear them—they were his business!

SIGNAL POINT IN SPACE (Short—6,000)by Charles Recour102

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Don Messing knew that a strange craft was approaching Phosbe—but then the signal faded . . .

THE CYCLOPEANS (Novelette—20,000)by Richard S. Shaver112

Illustrated by Bill Terry

Did a giant race once walk the Earth's surface? And if so, what catastrophe destroyed them?

Front cover painting by James B. Settles, illustrating

a scene from "The Eye of the World."

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

SOME TIME ago Alexander Blade was in our offices and he happened to see a new cover that James B. Settles had just brought in. At that time Alex told us he would like to do a story around the cover, so we put the cover aside and told Alex to start writing. Well, a couple of months went by and we didn't hear anything more from him on that subject, so finally we called him up and asked him if he had forgotten the assignment he had asked for. He said no, that he had been working on the story for the past two months. We lifted our eyebrows at that, for Alex is usually a fast writer. So we asked him why doing a fifteen thousand worder should take so long. He came back with: "Fifteen thousand? I've already written seventy-five thousand!"

WELL, AFTER we lifted our editorial jaws off of the desk we got enough strength up to ask humbly: "How long is this story going to be?" He replied, "I'll try and hold it to eighty thousand. O.K.?" In a daze we told him o.k. And we hung up fast to do some rapid calculating. Eighty thousand words was a lot of words—too many for one issue. In that moment we decided we'd have to make Alex do a severe cutting job on the story. So we waited until he brought in the manuscript a few days later. We started to tell him that he'd have to cut it, but he just shook his head and said, "Read it first." We read it.... You'll find the first part of this eighty thousand word novel in this issue. We didn't want to ruin a terrific novel!

SO AFTER that editorial insight we won't bother telling you what the novel's about. We'll let it be a complete surprise for you, and we'll hot that after next month, when you finish reading the final chapters, you'll agree with us that Alexander Blade did a magnificent job.... And incidentally, we think that this month's cover is a topnotcher too....

GUY ARCHETTE returns with a short story entitled, "Haunted House." This is a unique little tale, the story of a small town and a strange series of circumstances

that centered around a mysterious house on the edge of the town. The story has a really smash ending, so we can't tell you a word more without spoiling things, so we'll leave it at that, just saying that you'll be surprised!

"SIGNAL POINT In Space" is Charles Recour's latest offering. It's a interplanetary yarn concerning the communications systems of the future. You may have been reading lately in your newspapers, accounts of plans for future "space stations" to be built by man in his conquest of the void. Well, Recour went one step further along these lines and shows you just how far man will have to go, and what an integral part of interplanetary commerce "signal points in space" will be. The story concerns the keeper of one of these stations, isolated on a small satellite, his life dedicated to guiding space ships through perilous asteroid belts. It seems like a singularly dull existence for a man to be faced with—but we can assure you right now that the hero, Don Marming, found that he had plenty of excitement on his hands one day when he received a strange signal from outer space, and—but that's right where we stop. You can take it up from there and find out for yourself what happened....

FINISHING up the issue is a great new story by Richard S. Shaver. "The Cyclopes" is the story of a giant race of men who once lived on the Earth. And they might have remained here if a great catastrophe hadn't taken place, forcing them to return to their "home" planets far out in space. Just what happened will thrill you, and at the same time you may find yourself doing quite a bit of thinking. For as Dick points out, it could easily have happened!

WHICH brings us to the end of this month's lineup. Next month we'll present the concluding chapters of Alexander Blade's great novel, and also, the new Rog Phillips novel that we've been talking about for the past two issues. So we'll see you then.....WLH

FLOWER ANIMALS

By Walter Lathrop

EVERY one of us has heard of the beautiful Coral reefs of tropical waters. We picture a mass of jagged but very scenic rock formation in the sea surrounding colorful islands. And yet, were the truth known, these "rock" formations we have come to know as coral, are in actuality the product of a myriad tiny living creatures!

Picture if you can, exquisitely designed creatures that resemble flamboyant flowers. Envision them existing by the tens of millions. This is the first stage in the production of coral.

What actually occurs is that in most cases these tiny flower animals secrete a hard, skeleton structure, which, after the death of the softer sections of the animal, form what we know as coral. The skeletons of a myriad number of these flower animals is

necessary to produce a single coral reef. But after layer on layer of the tough skeleton substances have adhered to each other over a long period of time, the coral becomes as we know it today, a beautiful scenic attraction that is the delight of the traveler.

On the opposite side of the picture, these tiny flower animals, forming coral reefs, have proven to be a hazardous existence to the mariner. Unless the coral reef has been charted, a ship may well find itself neatly sheared along its keel if it runs afoul of a coral reef.

Thus, this tiny creature of the sea, in itself a seemingly harmless, and a beautiful thing to behold, can be the destroyer of a mighty ship of man's scientific genius. Just one more proof that Mother Nature isn't so easily outdone!

PIT TRAP - ANT STYLE!

By Milton Matthew

WE ALL KNOW of the Big Game hunters who have been known to waylay ferocious beasts by means of pit traps. Frank Buck is probably one of the most famous names known to the modern generation as a man who utilizes this means for successfully catching his prey.

But what about the world of small creatures around us—creatures that we walk upon in our daily life without even the faintest idea that we are treading upon them. Is our science of hunting an exclusive human commodity? One look at the world of the Ant-Lion will answer that question with a resounding, no!

This little creature, which occurs for the most part in European countries, is very adept at the art of pit trapping. For it is with this art that the larva maintains its existence while the transformation to mature insect takes place.

The ant-lion selects the site for its trap and then proceeds to crawl backward, the bottom of its abdomen acting as a shovel to plough up the earth. Its site is usually a sandy piece of ground, so that the walls of the pit it digs will be an unsure footing for any prey that stumbles into it. It uses a front leg as a shovel to scoop up the dislodged dirt, placing small heaps of

the soil on its head. Then, with a quick, jerking motion it throws the dirt aside and away from the pit, in the manner of a miniature steam shovel.

It proceeds with its work in this fashion until a pit approximately two inches deep is completed. The width of the pit is usually around three inches. Then it burrows in at the bottom of the pit, only its jaws extending above the surface of the dirt.

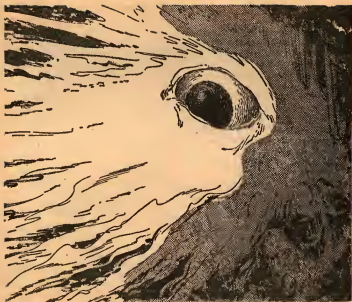
And finally some unwary insect blunders in, in much the same fashion as a tiger would fall into a man made pit. And once in, unlike the tiger which has been known to escape, the ant-lion's prey stands little chance. For even if the jaws of the ant miss the trapped prey at the first attack, the victim finds that it cannot successfully crawl up the sides of the trap in time to escape the second snap of hungry ant jaws, because the sandy walls collapse around it, throwing it directly into the waiting larva's mouth.

Does all this strike a familiar note to you? No? Well maybe this final bit of information will bring the ant-lion's identity home to you. For we have this little creature in the United States. And even if you haven't seen one yourself, you've certainly heard of him. Over here we call him the doodlebug!

The EYE OF THE WORLD



They ran in terror down the long stone corridor, and behind them the flame-eye grew in size . . .



By ALEXANDER BLADE

A strange mountain appeared magically in the heart of Africa — and with it, a terrible menace to all of mankind. Was there no way to fight it?

FOREWORD

THEY DID it in the name of patriotism. They beat him until he was unconscious and shipped him out of the country.

It happened near one of the suburbs on a dark night while the forces of law and order were asleep. When the sun rose over the silvery Atlantic,

America awakened without knowing that she had lost one of her best scientists.

His name was Dr. Val Pakkerman. Unfortunately he was not a well known name. His real importance in the world of science was a matter of record. But he had quietly dodged

the fame he deserved. To the people of Maple City he was just plain Doc Pakkerman. The tall, broad-shouldered man in the gray coat, who walked as if he knew where he was going. He was only thirty-five years old. His fellow scientists believed that he was going far.

Masked men did the deed. They seized Val Pakkerman just as he started home from his laboratory at midnight. They put him in a car and taxied him out to a deserted farm house.

"I don't understand this at all," Dr. Pakkerman grumbled in his low melancholy voice. He was slow to anger. He rarely lost his temper. Nevertheless, his fists tightened. He would have taken his chances in a physical showdown with the four bruisers if he had known. But he couldn't believe, at first, that it was more than a gag. "What's the game?"

"Save your questions for the trial."

"Trial? What's the charge?"

"Don't act so damned innocent. You know the charge."

He was led into a council of shadows. A curtain of white sheets divided the room. A lantern beyond the curtain cast shadows of eight or ten men behind the scenes. The four masked thugs stayed on his side of the curtain to guard him. They seated him to face the curtain. He stared at the silhouettes of his inquisitors, who milled about and talked in low voices, but never showed their faces.

One shadow moved close with the air of taking command. The voice sounded low, heavy threatening.

"Dr. Pakkerman, we've brought you here to challenge your loyalty to the United States of America."

"My loyalty!" Pakkerman gave a gruff laugh. They couldn't be serious. "My loyalty is a matter of record."

"We charge you with betraying

your country to Russia." The shadow was close against the curtain, arm extended, fingers pointing.

Val Pakkerman suddenly knew that this was more than a gag. The word *fascist* came to his lips. But he held his silence. He looked around at the dismally bare room. Back of him two of the masked thugs were holding pistols. There was nothing to do but face the music. Harsh music. It didn't make sense. He sprang to his feet.

"What's your authority?" He started toward the curtain. "Come out, let's get this in the open."

The quick footsteps back of him were his only warning. He turned to catch sight of an arm swinging a pistol at him. The barrel of the weapon struck his forehead and drew a gash over his right eye.

"There's your authority!" the voice behind the curtain snarled. "Now sit down and listen."

DR. PAKKERMAN had staggered backward, grasping the chair for support. He sat, leaning forward, keeping an eye on the four guards. They were all set to batter him down if he rose again.

The words from behind the curtain came at him fast now.

"You speak three European languages, don't you, Dr. Pakkerman?"

"Great guns, that's no charge."

"Your relatives intermarry with the Russians, don't they?"

"Who do you mean?"

"Deny it, will you? We've already got the facts. Your cousin married a Russian girl."

"An American-born Russian—yes. —What of it? That doesn't involve me."

"Shut up. We're not asking you, we're telling you. Give him another one, Mat, he's not being congenial."

The pistol barrel grazed the back of Pakkerman's head. He swung his arms, then, and caught up the chair. If he'd had half a break, he would have cleaned house. But another blow from the pistol barrel traced the line of pain across his right eye. At the same time two weapons jammed into his sides like blunt spears with a guarantee of quick death. He dropped the chair. The voice ordered him to be seated. He obeyed quietly. The blood trickled over his face. He smeared it with a handkerchief.

"Let me say one word," he uttered.

"We're doing the talking."

"I made my loyalty pledge to the government."

"We've got our own evidence."

"The government gave me a clean record."

"Who is the government? We're the government, Dr. Pakkerman. We've taken this loyalty business in our own hands. When we get through, there'll not be a damned Red left in Maple City. We'll ship them back."

"I'm no Red and you know it! This is no American act. I don't know who you are, but you'll answer to the government—"

The rain of blows from the masked men put an end to the doctor's attempt at self defense.

He was missed at his laboratory the next day. And the next. And there might have been a national scandal over his strange disappearance if it had not been for the signed statements, extracted from him, to explain his absence.

A few small headlines covered the case, as far as the newspapers were concerned. Dr. Pakkerman had abruptly left on a vacation. Destination unknown. His scientific researches in the fields of social engineering would be suspended during his absence.

One newspaper carried his picture, and mentioned that his achievements, little known by the public, stood high in the world of science. Another paper suggested slyly that he was believed to have been a Red, and that the political atmosphere of America became too hot for him.

What the newspapers did not know was that Dr. Val Pakkerman was shipped out of the United States on a boat bound for a Caribbean port. In Guatemala, he was transferred to another vessel. The ship's doctor found him dazed and ill. He was unable to give any satisfactory account of himself.

One after another, three ships' crews took him on as a derelict whose good muscles made him a useful deck hand, in spite of his unsteady mind. He had to be watched. He was unpredictable. He had no purpose, no destination, no past, only a name. Anyone might guess that he had seen better days. Ships' officers would wonder whether there was anything left in that battered, scarred, confused head of his.

Eventually he fell into the hands of a U. S. Navy Captain, who had been assigned to take his crew up one of the water-ways into the interior of Africa. As the captain knew, the mysterious assignment was a dangerous one, of military import, probably to be accompanied by some surprise violence if not death.

In the end the African job turned out to be a far greater tragedy than any of the crew had bargained for. The crew was forced to deliver its mysterious cargo into the mountainous uplands above the African lake of Bunjojop. There the tragedy struck its full blow.

Of the one hundred seamen and officers who marched into the moun-

tains with the captain, eighty lost their lives.

One of eighty was Dr. Val Pakkerman.

The whole incident was covered up, so that the American nation never knew what happened. For the two years hardly anyone knew...

CHAPTER I

AS a fortune teller, Madam Lasanda should have foreseen the cash.

It was nearly eight by the big neon clock at the end of the park, and the crowds were streaming in to fill the five thousand seats around the platform. The lights had just come on, but there was still enough daylight that Madam Lasanda, watching from the window of her limousine, could sift the passing throngs for familiar faces.

"Slower, Martin."

"Yes, Madam." The chauffeur nodded.

"Can't you turn left into that park lane, Martin?"

"Official cars only, Madam."

"Never mind the sign. Turn left through the crowd. I'm looking for someone."

"Yes, Madam."

"Someone I haven't seen for a long time," Madam Lasanda added, more to herself than to Martin. She wasn't in the habit of justifying her actions to the sparrow-faced little man who drove her limousine.

The pedestrian streams opened to make way for the big car as it eased through the park. People turned to stare. Madam Lasanda! Was she coming to the Mayor's rally tonight? The newspapers had built a fire under the fortune telling "racket" and the city had recently taken action to revoke

licenses. Was Madam Lasanda looking for a chance to fight back?

"Look! It's Madam Lasanda. You know, the fortune teller."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure I'm sure. I saw her picture in the paper. I never forget a face."

"Yeah? No one ever forgets a face like that."

Madam Lasanda wore her black hair in a high pompadour, with a glitter of blue flashing from two sapphire-studded combs. She wore sapphire earrings, and a choker of elaborate design which displayed a single brilliant blue sapphire at her throat.

But for all the flash of jewels, it was Madam Lasanda's eyes that people would remember. They would remember her strong Latin features and her smooth olive complexion, but but they would remember especially her eyes. Too dark and mysterious. Too deep and penetrating. Bright with the glitter of knowledge. Was it true that Madam Lasanda could tell you both your past and your future?

The chauffeur glanced back as he uttered in his thin, dry voice a seemingly innocent question.

"Is the Madam looking for someone special? Why not exercise your personal magnetism that makes people come to you?"

"How do you know but what I'm doing exactly that?"

"If so, shall I park and wait until he comes?"

"Martin, you just tend to your driving. I'll attend to the magnetism."

"Yes, Madam."

"Slower, please."

"Yes, Madam." The chauffeur touched the horn lightly. Ahead was a busy trafficway.

"Turn back," Madam Lasanda ordered. "Drive out on the grass as near to the seats as you dare."

HER KEEN eyes combed the rows. The man she sought was a tall, broad-shouldered ex-navy Captain, about forty years old—a man with steel blue eyes, a hard jaw, and a soft name—Allan Burgess.

She wanted to tell Allan Burgess his fortune. The fates that awaited him had been spinning in her mind so relentlessly that she had decided to seek him out and talk with him. It had been more than two years since she had seen him. He might not remember. However, she believed that he was living somewhere in this metropolitan area, within driving range of this suburb of Maple City. And there was a chance that tonight's Maple City meeting might attract him. It had been widely advertised to appeal to any and all persons of adventurous spirit.

She was banking upon Burgess' restless and impetuous nature. She would need only to plant a little suggestion. That would be hardly enough to set him in motion. Upon an adventure of hope? Hardly! He would probably be able to do more than hasten the tragedy. The weird catastrophe was pretty sure to follow as naturally as darkness follows daylight.

Darkness! Utter darkness for the world! Endless darkness. More swiftly than anyone knew, man's design for his own destruction was being prepared. For nearly two years, Madam Lasanda had played her fortune-telling games to keep from thinking of the reality that lay ahead. But she could not shield herself from knowing what she *knew*. A chain of past events had brought her into tune, so to speak, with the vibrant mystical forces which made a game of turning good into evil. As responsive as a finely tuned musical instrument, she was receiving messages.

Yesterday morning she had awakened actually screaming. In her dream she had been clinging to a web of rope. The rope had broken into shreds. Everywhere people were clinging to the shreds, or falling into the void. The rope to which she was clinging stretched into a thread, finer, and finer, until it was only a strand from a spider's web. She clung frantically, crying for help. Then a ray from the orange colored sun burned through the strand, and it melted away, and she was falling...

She was falling and screaming, and the orange sun was in her eyes.

Then she had fought out of the nightmare to awaken—but the burning light was still in her eyes. It wasn't the sun. It was a ball of orange flame as large as a silver dollar, hanging in the air. At first it seemed close enough to touch. Then it was far away. It was coming from the mirror. She flung a robe over it. But the ball of light kept coming through. She turned toward a picture on the wall. It was coming through the frame of the picture, burning with such intensity that she thought the frame would be damaged. But it swung as she whirled about. She rushed to her bed and buried her head under a pillow—and it was still there, shining into her closed eyes from somewhere thousands of miles away... And then she began to watch, as if through a darkened glass...for here was something to be understood.

THEN watching, she sank into a weird dream, half sleeping, half waking. Finally, the light wore away and she awakened to face the world of reality about her.

She dressed, hurried to her studio, and began at once to talk with her little magic doll, *Ksentsajiboa*. And it was then that she was inspired to

try to find Allan Burgess....

"Keep moving, Martin."

"The policeman signalled a stop, Madam."

"Oh, the pest. Very well, we'll humor him." She saw the officer walking across the grounds toward them. "Rather handsome, isn't he, Martin?"

Her pulse beat quickened. This broad-shouldered policeman might be Allan Burgess. If so, wouldn't her chauffeur be impressed! It would prove that her personal magnetism had succeeded!

But the scowling officer was not the man, nor was he in the mood to hear any explanation. They had no business on the park grounds. He directed them to the shortest way out. "Let's see you move."

Madam Lasanda's lips pouted. Stupid fellow. He had ignored her friendly smile. And her jewels. Oh, well,—

"Do as the officer says, Martin."

Martin circled to the nearest lane that led to the trafficway.

Madam Lasanda looked back. The program was beginning.

The band gave out with three crash chords and a wail, and suddenly all the lights were on one figure in the center of the stage. It was the "Yippee Girl" who had been imported to put the mayor's program over with a bang. Madam Lasanda could see her swinging about in her blue and red spangles. Gay sweeping motions. Cheers from the audience. A wave from her silken arms caused the hullabaloo to subside for a moment. Then her voice came through the big amplifiers and she sang out her famous radio "Yee-ipp-eeel" and the crowd went wild.

Madam Lasanda scoffed to herself. Artificial ballyhoo! What did it amount to? Corny comedians mak-

ing stupid people shout—for what? If they only knew! Madam Lasanda snapped at her chauffeur.

"Step on it, Martin. Get me out of this noise. Step on it."

"The pedestrians, Madam—"

"Swing around them, you dolt. You don't have to stay on the lane. Cut the corners. *That way*—around that hedge."

The chauffeur obeyed on an ill-considered impulse. He darted toward the trafficway and plunged into it. He would have caught into the stream easily if it hadn't been for the midget car driving without lights. He slammed on the brakes. The midget leaped out of danger and scurried away.

But the sudden touch of the brakes played havoc. Madam Lasanda jerked forward. Before she could gain her equilibrium and divest herself of a snarl and a curse, she heard the screech of the next car back, and she had the sudden vision of half a dozen cars piling up.

CRASH! Clang! Clunk!

THE CAR behind banged squarely into the rear end of the limousine. With bumpers locked, the two cars coasted forward to an uneasy stop. Back down the line the brakes of other cars went into action; but the stream was already diverted, passing on safely to the left.

Madam Lasanda shrieked, not from any physical pain, but from rage.

"The idiot! What's the matter with him! Must be blind. Or drunk. Get me outa here! I'll tell him!"

She assured herself, at first glance, that the other half of the crash was a dilapidated repaint job of the sort which, in her opinion, had no business cluttering the streets. Martin opened the door for her. She stepped

out and marched back to confront the offender.

"You pinhead! Why don't you learn to drive? Where's a cop? Someone get me a cop. I'll sue your socks off for this, you blind, stupid—"

She stopped short. The man at the wheel had evidently taken a hard bump. His eyes were closed. His fingers slipped from his forehead down over his face, leaving blood stains. He had struck the side of his head, somehow, and now all he seemed to care for was a nice quiet nap.

Madam Lasanda gulped. "*Allan Burgess! Of all persons!*"

The big man's steel blue eyes opened dreamily. "Someone call me?" He shook his head dizzily, and tried to blink his eyes in focusing. "What goes on? Who are you?"

"You don't know me, do you." Madam Lasanda said in a changed tone. "That's all right. Are you hurt bad?" We better take care of you. We'll get an ambulance."

"Hell, I'm not hurt. Just jolted."

"It was all my fault," Madam Lasanda said quickly. "My half-witted chauffeur—"

Allan Burgess! She had done it. She had brought him directly to her. Her mystical magnetism!

Well, that was all that really mattered. Cops and onlookers had gathered in by this time to take the situation in hand. She was talking with them sweetly. There would be no trouble.

"It was all my fault, officer. I'll take care of everything. Here—here's my card. And one for this gentleman. If he'll come to my studio I'll gladly pay the damages. You'll come."

"When?"

"Tomorrow."

"All right. What time?"

"In the afternoon—say four."

"I'll see you."

CHAPTER II

AT FIVE minutes to four Allan Burgess walked into the narrow lobby of the Garmond Building, consulted the directory, and stepped into the elevator.

"Eleven, Please."

He had never been in this building before. He didn't often come to these suburbs. As the levator ascended, he glanced at the card to catch the room number.

MADAM LASANDA, Past Present and Future.

He had hardly given this appended item of information a thought until now. She must be a fortune teller or something. Well!

His chief recollection of last night's encounter was that he had come out of his daze listening to kindly, apologetic words spoken in a deep, distinct feminine voice. And then his eyes had been full of this handsome, dark complexioned woman who was looking at him as if she knew him. As if she were either an old friend or hoped to become one immediately.

From the elevator he trailed around the disjointed corridors to the left, to the left again, up three dark steps, to the left, and then, through a final passageway that would have been totally dark had it not been for the green illuminated sign at the end of the corridor: *Madam Lasanda.*

He rang twice and waited. He mopped the perspiration from his forehead. The small bandage over the left temple would be noticed immediately, but he would be ready to reassure the lady that the injury was nothing.

Light footsteps. The lock sounded,

the door opened a few inches. Madam Lasanda was looking at him from under her dark eyelashed, and there was just a hint of a smile. A nice blend of sophistication and grace in her manner. The gentlest opening of the door. The slightest lift of the eyebrow, a barely audible rustle of the silken sleeves of her dark green gown as she gestured him to enter; and the gesture was hardly more than the trifling motion of her fingers. She was shapely, he thought, and consciously alluring in her movements. As if taking for granted that her mysterious charms would please him.

"Mr. Burgess. You are exactly on time."

He nodded and suppressed an impulse to say that he was usually on time when he came to collect money. It was best left unsaid. Under the present surroundings he couldn't quite imagine that an intentionally facetious remark would fit.

She closed the door back of him, then led the way through the tiny reception room, illuminated with a green and amber chain of lights in the form of an inverted crown overflowing with jewels. Allan looked around with a feeling that he had stepped into a too expensive night club, and he cast about to make sure of his exit; but this time she was leading him through dark green portieres into a passageway hung with heavy red velvet draperies. Presently he was seated in an inner room where tiny stars twinkled from a velvety purple sky overhead. The room was circular, small and intimate, lighted only by the stars and the faint glistening of jewels which formed the windows of mosques painted in an oriental panorama around the curved wall.

Burgess seated himself. He mum-

bled an uneasy, "Hm-m."

"Are you comfortable, Mr. Burgess?"

"Not too. Don't you have any lights in this place?"

"Your eyes will adjust in a moment."

"I didn't come for a seance, you know. It was in regard to that settlement for the accident last night." Burgess leaned forward, wondering whether the white patch on his forehead showed to advantage. He said, "I came at your suggestion."

"Yes, of course." Madam Lasanda sat across from him. Between them was a small table. One of the two objects on it Burgess recognized as the well known crystal sphere. The other was some sort of doll or statuette, silhouetted dimly before him. "If you wish more light—"

MADAM LASANDA touched a switch at the base of the statuette. A red glow highlighted the little copper figure. It was a finely shaped model of a man, six inches tall, clothed in a loincloth with a sash that bore an ancient Egyptian design.

"There. My little Egyptian fire tender is always ready to provide light. Isn't he cunning? And very wise, too."

If Allan had been in the mood to appreciate fine modeling, he might have praised this coppery little fellow. Excellent posture. Well molded muscles, liteness, strength.

One coppery arm was extended. The hand held a curved stick or flail, as if to beat the fire.

The glow in the base of the statuette had grown into a red flame.

Now gentle rhythmic motion became observable. The fire tender's body swayed back and forth slowly,

his arm flailed the fire with a slow pendulum-like movement, and the red blaze rose and fell in rhythm.

Rising and falling, the red flare gave a strangely moving quality to the glow in Madam Lasanda's eyes. She was looking at Allan intently, as if wondering whether he was not pleased.

"His name is Ksentajaiboa," she said. "Did you ever see anything like him, Mr. Burgess?"

"I never did."

"Your answer is a trifle blunt, but entirely honest. I was sure you never had."

"How could I? You probably had him made to order for your hocus pocus."

"I can see that you're not familiar with the Ksentajaiboa. There happen to be many of him. Their light shines far—farther than you would ever guess."

Allan Burgess drew a slow breath to hold back his impatience. "Very unusual—yes."

"You're not comfortable, Mr. Burgess. Would you care for a cup of tea?"

"I simply came for your settlement, Madam Lasanda, he said sharply. "No tea, please."

But Madam Lasanda had already touched a button. The dark portieres parted and a thin-faced servant appeared. In Burgess' mind, this face was somewhat associated with a chauffeur's cap and uniform.

"Will you bring us tea, please, Martin?"

The servant bowed, the portieres swallowed him up, and Madam Lasanda smiled at Burgess as if to assure him that everything would be quite cozy in a moment.

"The settlement—yes. How much do you expect?"

"You name it."

"You have a figure in mind, no

doubt?"

"I always go on the assumption said Burgess, "that the other fellow is fair until he proves otherwise."

"That's very nice. You don't change much, do you Allan Burgess? The years don't harden you as they might some men. You stay just about the same, don't you?"

Allan Burgess started. By the light from the fire tender he thought he saw a quint glint of much knowledge in the eyes of this necromancer.

"What do you know about me?" he blurted.

"I am a crystal gazer, you know. I see the past and the future."

"Last night you called me by name. How did you know my name?"

"We have ways of knowing."

"Did you see it on the dashboard of my car?"

"Possibly."

"All right, forget it. Let's get on with settlement."

THE DOOR chimes rang. She touched a switch. The red flame fluttered. The little fire-tender's arm stopped and the flame went out.

Martin appeared at the portieres to say that he would answer. He returned a moment later.

"It's a messenger from the city hall, Madam. I told him that you were busy. He said he would wait outside, Madam."

"All right. The tea, please Martin."

She touched a button, the red flame spurted up, and the little Egyptian fire tender resumed his rhythmic ritual. Burgess saw that Madam Lasanda was looking at him intently, smiling.

"Confidentially, Mr. Burgess, the city wants to revoke my license. They think I'm not a reliable consultant because I can't write a lot of letters after my name. College degrees and

such. But you don't think I'm a charlatan, do you, Allan Burgess?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"Well, if they only knew what I know about people—about you, for instance."

"You don't know anything about me."

"Oh, yes, I see your past and your future clearly. Wouldn't you like to know what I see for you?" She reached to touch his hand.

He jerked away impatiently.

"I didn't come here to—"

But she was crowding him, and she spoke with a strange vibrant intensity.

"Would you like to know what happened to the hundred men you marched up the mountain somewhere in Africa?"

Burgess was suddenly on nerve's edge. The lightning had struck without warning. His sharp movement caused a flutter of the red blaze.

"I got twenty of them back alive!" he said, hitting his words.

"And the other eighty?"

Burgess sprang to his feet. "I said I got twenty of them back alive! *The answer is plain enough.*"

In his sudden action he upset his tea. He made no move to set the cup upright.

"You think the other eighty are dead, don't you?"

"Of course they're dead!"

"But they're not."

"Eighty of them are dead! If you've heard anything about it—"

You shot ten of them down, didn't you, Mr. Burgess?"

"Where did you get all this?"

"Ten of them. You cut them down with bullets."

"I did what I had to do, I had to keep them moving."

"You believed that the whole civilized world depended upon your get-

ting that cargo across the pass, didn't you, Mr. Burgess? That was too bad."

"It was a job. Someone had to do it. It was no kid's play."

"It was a man's job, Allan Burgess. That's why they gave it to you. And you think it's all over and forgotten. But it isn't. *Those eighty men aren't dead. They're alive—terribly alive!*"

"You're crazy! Those men were my responsibility. If they had lived, I'd have brought them back. If they were still alive, I'd go to them."

"They are alive, and if you want to know the tragic fact, our civilized world is in grave danger from evil that hovers over those eighty men at this moment. They're rubbing elbows with the most dangerous force on this planet. Do you understand me?"

"I think you're crazy."

"Some of those eighty men used to be your loyal friends. Am I right, Allan Burgess?"

Burgess drew a hard breath, feeling caged because there was no way to give vent to his outraged feelings. The over-turned teacup had not been touched. The red flame appeared to shrink from him.

"I repeat, Mr. Burgess," she said in her strong but carefully controlled tone, "those eighty men are not dead. The world might be safer if they were. They are dwelling in the company of an evil force a thousand times more dangerous than atomic bombs. You will find them living under the very mountains where you thought they met their death."

"All I say is, you're crazy."

Madam Lasanda nodded, as if ready to dismiss the matter. She called to Martin. He appeared and she said, quite casually, "Tell the messenger that if the city wants to revoke my license, go ahead. They may as well. I've said all I have to

say. I'm through. The whole world will be through very soon."

The servant hesitated for a moment, then shrugged and went obediently to deliver the message.

Burgess mopped his forehead, gave an abrupt gesture of leaving, and started toward the exit.

Madam Lasanda called to him. "Your settlement, Mr. Burgess."

"To hell with the settlement. I'm going to Africa."

CHAPTER III

ALLAN Burgess went straight to the airport. On the way he mentally rearranged his business affairs. A vacation—that's what he'd tell them at the office. It was too confining. He needed a vacation of several weeks. They could like it or not. If they wanted to believe he was out prospecting for gold, or getting married and honeymooning, or touring around the world looking for another job, it was quite all right with him.

Just so they didn't know the absurd truth—that some dark-eyed fortune teller had thrust a rapier through his soul; that he would endure fiery mental torture until he proved to himself that her story was false.

Fifteen minutes after he reached the airport, as he was striding along the line of private hangers, his eye caught upon a yellow monoplane with the name "Yippee" painted across the side in bold blue script.

"Pretty classy, huh?" This from one of the grease monkeys who noticed his fascination.

"Plenty. I could use something like that in my business."

"You can't use that," the grease monkey said. "That belongs to the Yippee Girl—you know—on the radio.

She hops around in her own plane, and that's it."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah, She'll be here in about five minutes."

* * *

The previous night's meeting in the park had gone over with a bang. Thanks to the Yippee Girl, it had been almost as exciting as a football victory.

"Maple City is the greatest little city in the world!" the mayor had thundered, with the air of an oracle coining a phrase, and five thousand listeners had roared their applause.

The band blared, the mayor orated, and the Yippee Girl whooped it up with comedy gags fresh from New York's slickest radio studios. And at the end she wrapped up the event, so to speak, by making everybody hush a lung with some old-time community slinging.

That did it. Every man, woman and child went home completely sold on their own dear Maple City. Maple City would soon become the most noted little city in America.

How? Well, no one knew precisely how. But everyone was figuring. For the big idea of the evening was the mayor's announcement of a ten thousand dollar contest.

Ten thousand dollars would be paid to the person or persons who performed the greatest service to the world in the name of Maple City.

"Every city from coast to coast will be imitating us, you'll see," Mayor Channing said to the Yippee Girl afterward, as they rode away in the official car. "Yes sir, Maple City is my own little oyster. Right in the palm of my hand. Notice how that crowd whistled and stomped when I got up to speak?"

"Oyster—m-m-m," the Yippee Girl murmured. She was looking out the

window.

"What do you see?" the mayor asked

"The cutest little restaurant. I wonder what they serve."

The mayor lifted an eyebrow. "Hungry, Yippee? How about a drink at my private club?"

"No drinks, thanks."

"All right, they've got sandwiches and things. I told the boys I'd bring you right over after the speech. They're all set for you."

"The boys? Who?"

"My pals that help me run the city."

The Yippee Girl frowned. "You mean the city council or something?"

In answer the mayor winked at her.

FOR A moment her glamour role slipped and she was just plain Susie Carson, struggling over a high school course in government. She gave her blonde head a toss, the way she used to do when she and the teacher were about to get into a rugged argument. Then she remembered that the yellow hair wasn't stringing down over her eyebrow, as in school days, but was done up in gorgeous waxen sweeps and swirls, and that she was the glamorous radio bombshell who knew all the answers in gags of one syllable. She said, "Oh, you mean the boys."

"Sure. You know," the mayor winked again. "Back of the scenes, we've got the city in the palm of our hands."

"Yippee!" she said with a little gulp.

"It's our own little oyster."

"Oysters!" Susie Carson was famished. She hadn't dared eat a bite before the program. That alone was enough to give her an awful emptiness in the stomach, without all this talk about "The boys" to make mat-

ters worse. Again she was only Susie Carson. It was dawning on her that she had been brought in as a front, to sell a bill of goods to the people; and now she was about to see the sham behind the scenes.

Five minutes later a dozen over-stuffed men in a dimly lighted club room were drinking a toast to her, and she was playing her part as their honored guest with all the cordiality she could muster.

"Whoop it up for Maple City!" she shouted.

"Yippee!" the boys echoed, lifting their glasses.

"Which one of you boys is going to win that ten thousand dollar prize?"

The mayor looked at his cronies, and Susie Carson watched the sly smiles spread through the group.

"Shall we tell her?" the mayor asked. "It's this way, Yippee. Confidentially, no one will ever win it. See, we put the requirements so high—well, when no one comes through it'll gradually be forgotten."

"Ugh? Then what about the ten thousand?"

The mayor winked and patted her on the shoulder. "Come back in a year and see our new club room. We'll put on a real party. Yippee!"

They were all yelling "Yippee for Yippee!" when they were interrupted by a commotion from the rear room.

"We've got an eavesdropper, boss!"

The doorman and a bartender ushered a round, unkempt, pumpkin-faced fellow into their presence.

"We caught him listenin' at the north window."

"Bring him in. Let's have a look at him," said the mayor.

The fellow ambled in willingly grinning like a boy. He seemed to be taking it as a joke on himself. He

looked around the circle of searching eyes, and his head ducked forward each time he noticed something that surprised him. First, the girl; then, three bottles on a small table; finally, the mayor himself.

"Ugh! Hizonner! In person!"

"Who are you?" the mayor demanded.

"They call me Jimmy Ruggles."

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothin'."

"That's no answer. Were you listening at the window?"

"Tryin' to. You gents don't talk loud enough to make it interestin'."

"What did you expect to hear? Speak up."

"I missed yer speech in the park, yer honor, so I come here—"

"Don't give us that talk!"

"An' besides, I didn't git to see the Yippee Gal." Here he turned his merry eyes full upon Susie Carson. "Gosh-ding-it, you're pertyl!"

She laughed. One of the boys mumbled that the fellow was simple minded but probably harmless. The mayor wasn't so sure. He might have ordered an arrest, but the Yippee Girl decided to take matters in her own hands.

"All right, buddy, you've seen me now, and you can read the mayor's speech in tomorrow's paper. Now run along like a good boy, and no more eavesdropping. See?"

She took him by the arm and led him toward the door. He looked back, reluctant to go.

"I aim to do somethin' big fer Maple City someday an' win that ten thousand—"

"All right, all right," the mayor snapped.

"My old friend, Doc Pakkerman, used to say, what this town needs is a good cleanup."

"Get out! Get out!" the mayor exploded. "I don't want to hear any-

thing about Doe Pakkerman."

Then Susie Carson, feeling a surge of sympathy for the fellow, whispered something quite bold in his ear just as he was leaving.

"Do you want to carry my luggage for me tomorrow afternoon?"

"Huh?"

"Meet me in the Harrison lobby at five. Wear your best Sunday clothes."

"Huh? Sure. I got a necktie."

CHAPTER IV

BY FIVE o'clock on the day of the Yippee Girl's departure, she had managed to shake the crowds of radio fans and public officials. For a moment she was Sue Carson, private citizen.

Jimmy Ruggles placed her bags in the taxi and opened the door for her with vastly exaggerated elegance of manner. The buttons of his blue serge coat threatened to pop whenever he bent. His bronzed face shone beneath his neatly plastered hair. When she invited him to get in and ride out to the airport with her, he was fairly incandescent with pleasure. In a moment they were riding, and Sue Carson could tell from his stumbling efforts at conversation that this was one of the supreme moments in his life. He was riding with a celebrity! Moreover, she had complimented his bright red and yellow necktie.

"You spoke of Dr. Pakkerman, Jimmy," she said. "Does he live here?"

Jimmy Ruggles instantly lost his self-consciousness. Doe Pakkerman was someone he could talk about.

"Use to. He ain't livin' now."

Was he a friend of Mayor Channing?"

"Gee-gosh, no. They was enemies. But they kept outa each other's way."

The mayor would dodge Doc because Doc knew so much. Doc woulda cleaned out the Cbanning boys and run the town right if he'd lived. How come you ask?"

"Just curiosity," said Sue. "I've been whooping it for the mayor for the last twenty-four hours, and I just wondered what the score was."

"Then I can tell you, Miss Yippee. I got a secret wish that I could carry on fer Doc, now he's gone. That's why I was listenin' last night. I've done it before. I hear lots of things that they wouldn't want in newspapers."

"Such as?"

"Such as takin' bribes an' fixin' deals an' balancin' up the city books to look nice."

Her eyes widened. "You know plenty, Jimmy!"

"But I ain't kiddin' myself. I ain't got the brains to do nothin' about it."

"Cleaning up a town is a big job for any man," Sue said consolingly. "By the way, what happened to your friend Pakkerman?"

"Well, not many folks know. He was doin' lot of work in science, they say, and workin' a little at city politics on the side. Then one day he disappeared. He never came back." Jimmy cleared his throat. "I happened to bump into him over in Africa. He was changed, but I knew him, even if he didn't remember me. To make it short we got took in on an ornery job."

"The upshot was that only twenty out of a hundred of us come through. I was lucky. Doc didn't do so well."

"Too bad."

"I still see it in my dreams—bim tumblin' over that embankment with a mile o' sheer drop under him. Him and dozens more. Like jumpin' beans shakin' off a shelf."

"Strange."

"An' everytime I dream over it I try to figure how any good come out

of that sacrifice. We'd come up by boat through a long river to a lake. There was a navy captain runnin' the show an' he claimed we had a job to do. An' we done it. He was a damn good captain too, if you'll excuse the French. But I never could figure—"

The taxi drove on to the airport grounds, circled around the side of a hangar and came to a stop near the bright yellow monoplane, *Yippee*.

"—but I never could figure—" Jimmy gulped like a frog. "*Gosh-ding it, there he is!*"

"Who?"

"That big tall guy lookin' at the plane. I'd known him on the moon."

"Who is he? Not Pakkerman? You said he was dead."

"It's the captain—the bird that got me through. Sure as shootin'. Well, I'll be—"

"You'll be gosh-dinged," said the Yippee Girl. "Why don't you go out and say hello to him?"

"I can't. I'm paralyzed!" Then Jimmy Rugglea bounded out of the taxi so quick the buttons popped off his coat. His necktie streaming like a comet, he bolted across to the plane, shouting, "Well, if it ain't Captain Burgess! *Yippee! Yee-ipee!!*"

CHAPTER V

THE second morning after their meeting the good plane Yippee met the dawn somewhere beyond the Atlantic. With Allen Burgess at the controls it was cutting a steady course toward a certain area in the heart of Africa.

The Atlantic Ocean had been left far behind, and the coastal lands of the Dark Continent had rolled back into the western haze.

Burgess turned to watch Jimmy Rugglea undergo the painful ordeal of awakening.

Ruggles groaned. He smeared the folds of his round face until he got both eyes open. He ran his fingers through his tousled hair. He crawled out of his seat and leaned over Burgess' shoulder.

"How we doin', Captain?"

"She's been purring like a kitten for hours," said Burgess with a glint of satisfaction.

"Her snorin' never bothered me none," Jimmy said, looking back at the Yippee Girl who was still sound asleep in her seat. The sight of her made his eyes wobble and blink.

"I didn't mean the girl. I meant the plane," said Burgess. "She's a sweet number. We were lucky to pick her up."

"Yeah! I'll say. I always been kinda shy of blondes, but this one—"

"I only hope she doesn't run out of fuel before we get there. Fortunately she's equipped with a couple extra tanks."

Jimmy's eyes gave an extra wobble. "Huh?"

"She wears a nice paint job, incidentally," Burgess added, flashing a glance at the sunlit yellow wings.

"Yeah, but I wish she wouldn't wear so much lipstick."

"Lipstick! I'm talking about the plane!" Burgess snorted. The presence of the girl must have tied Jimmy's mental faculties into a knot, he decided. He only added to Jimmy's confusion by mentioning that she had a well shaped fuselage and a perfect pair of propellers.

"Now which are you talking about?"

"The plane! The plane!"

"Oh. Gosh-ding-it, I keep thinkin' about the gal." The lines of Jimmy's face folded into deep worry. "She's not gonna like it when she wakes up and finds out where we're goin'. She trusted me till I bumped into you.

Then things began to happen so fast that she didn't have a chance. Every time you dropped those pills in her coffee I figured it was somethin' stronger than aspirin."

Allan Burgess felt a twinge of conscience. He said lamely, "She dared us to pilot her back to New York."

"That hunk of wilderness down there don't look to me like New York. I figure she'll blow a fuse—and I'm not talkin' about the plane."

"Leave the talking to me, Jimmy."

"What'll you say?"

"I'll tell her we got off our course. Then I'll sell her on a pleasure tour to Africa."

Jimmy knitted his brows. "You think she'll like it?"

Allan gave him a wink. "With a handsome guy like you along, how could she miss?" he pointed. "S-s-sh. She's waking up."

SUE CARSON came to life with such sweet, feather-brained little mumblings that Allan thought she was going to be in a very pleasant mood. But all of that changed when she looked out at the sun, high in the sky, and then down toward the unhabited wilderness of land below.

Her eyes widened.

"What time is it? Why haven't we reached New York?"

"Miss Yippee—"

Allan rose and placed a hand on her shoulder. She removed the hand, gently and decisively.

"Miss Yippee, how would you like to take a trip to Africa?"

"Africa! Great grasshoppers!"

"Have you ever been to Africa?"

"Never been near it."

"You're nearer than you think," said Jimmy, lifting an eyebrow.

The Yippee Girl looked down at the passing scene. Her eyes squinted, then widened, and suddenly they

were blazing anger at Allan.

"Are you telling me that—"

"Don't look now, Miss Yippee, but Africa is only a parachute jump from where you're standing."

She cocked her head, and said, in a very sarcastic tone, "Don't tell me. I can guess. You got off your course, didn't you! Sure!"

"How'd she know, Captain?" Jimmy asked.

The Yippee Girl stormed.

"You can't do this to me! I've got to be in New York. I've got an engagement. Three o'clock this afternoon. Turn back! I've got to be there!"

"You'll have to sit this one out, honey." Allan said, trying to be agreeable about it.

"I can't do it. They'll be furious. They'll try to trace me. They won't know what's happened. There'll be headlines, and they'll start a search—"

"Easy, Yippee. You underestimate me. Your radio-telephone enabled me to take care of all that. I called your agent."

"You called my agent? When?"

"Just after we took off. I explained things. I told him you had a sudden urgent call to fly to Africa."

"I had no such thing."

"Oh yes, you did. It was a loud, clear call. I heard it myself."

"You and who else?"

"Jimmy. He heard it, too. Didn't you, Jimmy?"

"Heard what?" said Jimmy blinking. "All I heard was a swish every time you dropped those pills in her coffee."

"Jimmy!"

"O-oh! So that's how it happened! I wondered how I could be dizzy. Well!" She was nodding slowly, her fists on her hips.

"Are you sore at us?" Jimmy asked.

SHE MUST have counted ten slowly, Allan thought. She dropped into a seat, giving forth a saccharine smile that would have withered a man of lesser courage. That versatile voice of hers was good for a fine variety of sarcastic inflections, all of them deadly.

"How could I be sore at two nice fellows like you?"

"Ugh?" Jimmy was in danger of taking her seriously.

"I'm just so happy to have a nice joy ride with you two handsome boys."

"Gosh!" Jimmy blurted. "That's what the captain said you would be. He said—"

"S-sh!" Allan gestured for silence. "Miss Yippee has the floor."

"Thank you. Now that we're all settled down for a cozy little conference, with the African jungles flying under us, won't you tell us the story of your life, Mr. Burgess? Begin with the severe bump on the head that you must have got when you were a child. Tell us all the strange things it makes you do. Go ahead, Captain. Where are we going, and why? Tell us all."

"With pleasure," said Allan, swelling his chest for the occasion. "Ladies and gentlemen, three days ago I had an encounter with a fortune teller—"

"Oh, no! No, please, Mr. Burgess!"

"Her name was Madame Lasanda, and she has an office in the Garmond Building in Maple City. I talked with her yesterday afternoon, and the things she told me—"

He paused. The Yippee Girl was leaning back looking at the ceiling, drumming her fingers on the arm rest, mumbling quietly, "New York. Three o'clock. Important engagement—and he meets a fortune teller!... Go on, Captain. You fascinate me. You're so original!"

Allan felt the lines around her eyes tighten. This farce was all well enough on the surface. But when it came to defining the real purpose back of his rash behavior, the toughest nerves tightened through his spine. He wasn't going to be angry, but he was as determined as a bullet on its course.

"Listen, Miss Yippee. *I'm checking up on eighty dead men.* Not so many months ago I *left them* on the side of a mountain. I've just learned that there's a big reason for checking up."

"Checking up—how?"

"If I can find eighty skeletons, that settles everything. But if I find eighty living men, they've got to be marched back. And if they're making mischief for the world, like the fortune teller said—well, that's my responsibility too."

"How could they make mischief for the world in the center of Africa?"

"Frankly, I don't know. It's my business to find out."

The girl was staring at him blankly.

"You were bumped on the head when you were a baby, weren't you?"

"In time, if everything goes well, I'll pay your damages for using your plane and gumming up your schedule."

"If things go well!" She was smiling like an indulgent nursemaid contriving the best punishment for a runaway child. "Don't mind me, Mr. Burgess. I'll only miss two days of my schedule. I'll take my plane now, boys. It was nice knowing you. Do you want to ride back to New York with me, or will you drop off here. You'll find parachutes under the seats."

IT WASN'T that simple, Allan Burgess decided. He meant to sit tight at the controls for another two hours. The vast lands that were unfolding

out of the eastern horizon were beginning to take on the features of the Zamtolor region beyond the upper Congo. The forenoon sun melted the sharp lines of the distant mountains into a blur of lavender haze. The lower ranges, passing under the plane, were highlighted with pink sunlight and etched deep with violet shadows. Silvery blue streams twisted through the cliff-walled depressions. Somewhere among those jagged pink and orange mountains had occurred the tragedy of eighty men.

"I'll write you a check for damages." Allan said, finally. "Anybody got a blank check on an out-of-town bank?"

The girl mocked. "I suppose you'll swoop down over a native village so I can cash it."

He said, "That's not as absurd as you think. There's a small airport at Bunjojop, and I've got life long credit with the chief there."

"I know. You drank from the same coconut," Sue Carson said. "And you told him if he ever came to America he could look you up. What a four-flusher!"

"Gosh!" Jimmy said. His funny face had been growing sadder and sadder during this uneasy discussion.

"What's the gosh for?" she asked.

Jimmy was frank about it, "I thought you were so nice when I'd hear you on the radio. Everybody thinks you're the gayest person in the world. But you ain't gay now, are you?"

Sue Carson didn't answer. Allan saw that the comment had struck home.

Jimmy went on, "Maybe you're full of Yippee till things go wrong. Is that it?"

The blunt words must have cut, Allan decided. But somehow they un-

locked the situation, and all at once the fight was over. The girl's sarcastic smile faded.

"I'm sorry, boys," she said. "I guess I've been talking pretty mean, haven't I?"

Allan changed his tone, too. "It's all our fault. Mine, I mean—not his. Jimmy's a good fellow. You take him back to New York with you, will you? Here, I'll turn it over to you."

"What about you, Captain?" Jimmy asked.

"You can let me parachute down over some village. I'll get along. The chief of Bunjojop will fix me up."

Jimmy's eyes wobbled. "You mean you'll go on, an' we go back? Gosh—ding-it, no!"

Then Sue Carson lifted a hand. "Listen my merry men, if you think you're going to shake me, you're wrong. You're off on a big adventure. I don't know what it's all about, but you're taking me along. Okay?"

"Huh!" Jimmy's face opened as if he expected a watermelon to drop in.

"You mean it? You'll stay with us?" Allan couldn't quite believe it. But Sue suddenly knew what she wanted.

"Boys, I've been shouting for mayors and chambers of commerce, until I'm blue in the face. I need a change of scenery. Captain, why don't you radio the chief of Bunjo—what-you-call-it and tell him he's going to have three guests for lunch?"

She offered her hand on the deal, and Allan felt sure that an indestructible triangle had formed in that moment.

CHAPTER VI

THEY SAILED down toward their own shadow that whipped along over the ledge of mountains, across a two mile lake and onto a level green shelf. Bunjojop was just the wide

bank of a mountain lake, enclosed in red rock walls hundreds of feet high.

"I hope you know how to land on a dime," Sue said.

"Where's the airport?" Jimmy asked.

"That's it, dead ahead. See that clearing that looks like all the hazards on a golf course?"

"Do you see it?" Sue asked skeptically.

"It isn't something you see. You just remember it's there and land on it. Don't worry. If we nose over, the whole town will be out to pick us up. Eight hundred of them."

It was a little copper mining town. The crude native huts were there if one looked for them. More conspicuous were the rows of unpainted wooden barracks that made up the miners' compound.

"They'll come out beating drums and shouting their own Hallelujah chorus," Allan declared, anticipating the excitement. This would be a welcome the Yippee Girl had never had before. "They'll burn bonfires and dance their native dances—"

"The Bunjo-woogie?" Sue asked.

"And the miners will come popping out of their mines like popcorn—black popcorn."

"Black or white or brown, just so we're welcome," Sue said.

Allan brought the plane down onto the table of thick grass.

Jimmy was mumbling, "Hey, where is everybody?"

They steadied on three points, rolling too fast for comfort over the bumpy ground. One wing dipped and sliced the grass, the plane shuddered and coasted on. They taxied up to the little unpainted station. No one appeared.

"Who's on duty?" Sue asked. "I haven't seen a soul."

"They'll be swarming like bees in

a moment," Allan assured her. "Let's get out."

They anchored down and locked up. They walked around the station. They struck out on the street along the edge of the lake.

"It's a ghost town," said Sue. There was a hint of alarm in her tone.

Allan agreed that it certainly wasn't the rush hour. There was something very strange about all this emptiness. Especially when Jimmy kept registering question marks all over his wide face.

"Gee-oopiter, I never seen it like this before! What's happened, Cap?"

"They'll show up around supper time," Allan said with a show of confidence.

"How soon is supper time?" Jimmy asked.

"As soon as they catch sight of us," Sue suggested. "They're probably one of these starving tribes you hear about, and we're the answer to their prayer."

Allan grasped at an inspiration. "Prayer—that's it. They're all off having some religious meeting."

HERE WERE the markets at the center of town. Baskets of fruit and nuts were on display. Shops and homes had been deserted within recent hours. The tracks of bare feet showed in the dust.

Allan stuck to his theory that there must be a tribal meeting going on somewhere in the surrounding mountains.

"Africans are always dominated by some religion," he said. "They pray and dance and feast all night. If we find them we might get in on the barbecue."

"That's just what I'm afraid of," said Sue. "Don't forget I'm young and tender."

They helped themselves to the food

at the market, and then approached the most respectable looking building in the town, the office of some mine official. The door was open. They called, and listened. No answer. They entered and looked around. Pen and paper on the table. Drinking water in a pail under a mosquito net. Food in the tin boxes in the pantry. Everything but people.

Jimmy began to talk in whispers.

Sue quit talking. Allan felt her glances, stronger than spoken questions. But he had run out of answers.

The sunlight was fading. Allan pointed to the rocky ridge at the east end of the town which he remembered as the "throne" of the chief. So far as he could tell no one was at home. At least they would wait until morning before they investigated. They had better get settled for the night.

"Don't worry," Allan said, as they trudged through the empty street. "Tomorrow we'll locate his majesty. He'll give us supplies and we can go on with our job."

They appropriated one of the dormitories in the miner's compound. The building was crudely constructed, with removable boards in the wall instead of doors. But the bunks inside offered what would seem like solid comfort, after their many hours aboard the plane.

"Scared?" Allan asked Sue.

"I'll be honest about it. If these natives come back in the night, I'll be scared silly."

"I'll stand guard right here in the center of the room," Allan promised. "So don't worry.... Listen."

The low rhythmic hums came from Jimmy's bunk. He was snoring already.

"Bless his dumb heart," Sue said. "He's a good guy."

"He's as loyal as they come," Al-

lan said. "Loyalty doesn't grow on trees, either."

"I'll give the guy credit, he knows how to pick a leader. Good night, Mr. Captain." She turned hastily.

Allan caught her hand. She gave him a quick, fierce smile, repeated her, "Good night," in a conclusive tone, and went to her hunk at the end of the room.

Allan sprawled on a mat in the center of the floor. Then he sampled one of the nearby hunks and found it more to his liking. He meant to sleep with one eye open, but before he could decide which eye, he was sawing logs.

CHAPTER VII

SUE CARSON was wide awake. The faint pat of footsteps had sounded out there on the path under the starlight. Now her nerves were on the alert as she listened. The steps faded into silence. She could hear her own breathing.

For a long time she lay there, unable to go back to sleep.

Both Jimmy and Allan were dead to the world, she decided. No wonder. Those hard-flying lads needed rest, no doubt about it. What a curious adventure, she thought, getting mixed up with such a pair. Here she was in Central Africa, half a world away from home, skylarking with two strangers who were chasing rainbows.

Well, at least there was some novelty in finding men who weren't chasing the almighty dollar—or chasing skirts!

This Captain Burgess was different, all right, Sue thought.

"He hardly even made a pass at me," she murmured to herself.

And she found the fact a bit puzzling, for she knew that she was "pretty darned passable." The way

the boys at the radio studios went for her, she had to sling a swift line to keep them at bay. As for the handsome mayors and chamber of commerce romeos who called on her to help put over a political program, she knew how to handle them. Give them a camera kiss for the newsreels. But afterward, backstage, dodge fast and if necessary, beat them off with clubs. All of this Sue could take in her stride.

But Allan Burgess had somehow jerked her out of her stride. And she rather liked it. He was so intent upon running down a mystery that he hardly saw her.

"He only wanted my plane," she pouted to herself.

Then she sat bolt upright. She was hearing it again—that light *pat, pat, pat* of footsteps out on the path.

"Allan!" She called in a low whisper that echoed softly through the room. "Allan.... Are you awake?"

Allan awakened out of a whirl of dreams and came to his feet. It was the Yippee girl whispering a tense alarm.

"Quick. He'll be gone."

"Who?"

"Some native. He's walking past. I saw him. See—there he goes."

Allan didn't see, but he sensed that an opportunity was about to get away from him. He scrambled for his pockets, grabbed a cigaret lighter. He snapped it on, then threw it out the window opening.

It struck the path with a clink of metal on gravel, and lay there.

Allan listened.

"He stopped in his tracks," Sue whispered. "He sees it."

"He probably thinks some trihal devil is on his trail." Allan adjusted his clothing and groped for his shoes.

"He's coming back. Look, he's just a boy!"

BY THE starlight Allan could make out the shadowy figure of a half clad child, tiptoeing cautiously toward the hit of fire that had mysteriously blazed up in his wake.

"What are you going to do? Sue asked.

"Catch him, if I can." Allan finished tying his shoes. "He may not talk English, hut we'll get some information out of him. Rouse Jimmy. Tell him to slip out the other door."

What followed would have looked good on any football field. Allan couldn't remember ever indulging in a livelier three minutes of broken field running. He chased, and the native boy jumped and dodged. The little fellow screeched like an animal when Allan once tackled him. But with a savage kick the boy scrambled free and went on a dead run for the upper end of the building.

He would have got away, then, if Jimmy hadn't stepped out of the shadows and blocked his path.

Allan, close on his heels, saw him draw a short bright blade from his belt. But he didn't strike, for Jimmy's stocky arms scooped him off his feet and the knife clanged to the gravel.

Such squealing! Allan thought they would never get him quieted. It was Sue's soft voice and the pleasant smile that turned the trick. She held the flaming cigaret lighter up, so that the boy could see his three captors face to face. He ceased to writhe in Jimmy's arms. Allan replaced the knife in the boy's belt—a gesture of trust. Then, to Allan's vast delight, the boy spoke a few words of English.

"Let me go.... Must go to chief!"

"Oho! You can talk!"

"Speak Engleese. Learn from boss of mines. I am errand boy. Chief

send me on errand."

He was in a frenzy, all right. But Allan was impressed by his good African face, his bright black eyes, and his gleaming white teeth. He was only eleven or twelve; he was intelligent and he spoke English. Just the prize that Allan needed.

"We're not going to hurt you," Allan assured him. "In a moment you'll go on your way, if you wish. But first, we need you as a friend. Do you understand?"

"I understan'."

"What is your name?"

"Name is Bunl." The boy was looking at Sue very seriously. It was plain that he had never seen anything like Sue before. "What your name?"

"Call me Yippee. Bunl and Yippee are going to be friends, aren't we?"

Allan pursued with questions. Little by little, the boy revealed flashes of information about the strange thing that had happened. First, two high officers had gone up the mountain trail and had failed to return. Then the whole town, from the mighty chief to the lowly slave, had been ordered by some tribal god to drop their work and ascend the trail. The chief had given the command and all his people had obeyed. They had a *hollow mountain*.

"A hollow mountain? That's a curiosity, for sure. How did you manage to get away?" Allan asked.

"Chief is in much trouble. So he send me. I slip away and come back. I come on errand for chief. I get charin from his throne. Maybe it will help."

The boy clutched his belt that evidently concealed some treasure other than the deadly little knife.

ALLAN questioned him. It was strange that a tribal god would

lead them into trouble. The boy answered that the tribal god had been deceived by a great evil power. "He is the *Scravvzek*. You know about it? Evil *Scravvzek* is strong like volcanoes inside the earth."

"What's he talkin' about?" Jimmy mumbled.

"What is the evil *Scravvzek*?"

"I do not see him," the boy said. His large eyes rolled and he shrugged. "No one knows. We do not see him. But we *feel*. The evil *Scravvzek* make us come into the mountain."

"He's making it up," Jimmy grumbled.

"S-sh. Let him talk."

"Must go now. Chief is waiting."

Allan patted the boy's hand. "Listen, Buni. If there's an evil *Scravvzek* that makes a whole tribe march into a mountain, I don't see how your chief is going to buy him off with some magic charm. What kind of charm is it?"

The boy produced a leather folder from his belt, and drew from it a piece of silver bearing a familiar design.

"An American dollar!" Jimmy exclaimed. "I'll be gosh-dinged an' goldarned."

"Buni," Allan said. "I've seen that charm before. I'm the one who gave it to your chief. I'm his friend. Maybe I can help."

"Will charm work?" the boy asked eagerly.

"It works miracles on ordinary troubles, don't you ever doubt it. But this evil *Scravvzek*—well, we'll have to see that ogre face-to-face before we can make any promises. Is he over in that direction, toward those two snow-capped peaks?"

"Yes," the boy said eagerly. "How do you know?"

"I know," Allan's jaw tightened.

"You stick with us, will you, Buni?"

"Got to take this charm—"

"You show me the way and I'll take it."

"It will take many hours to get there."

"Not the way we're going. Yip-pee's got a plane and some parachutes. You help us find some ropes and provisions and we'll take off at daylight. Okay, Jimmy? Okay, Yippee?"

CHAPTER VIII

THEY FLEW into the dawn that showed red and blue above the jagged horizon. They spiralled dizzily until the black mountains no longer stood as barriers. The tinted clouds were all around them, and they were soaring high above the lake of Bunjojop.

Sue was at the controls.

She piloted with a steady hand, following Allan's every order. He looked down upon the unfolding landscape, catching his directions from the towering snowtipped giants of rock.

"What's the matter, Captain? Have you run out of orders?"

When Allan didn't answer, but only scowled, Sue wondered, had he become ill? Something was wrong.

"Can't you get your bearings?"

"That should be the pass, dead ahead...but there's been a *change*!"

There was something in Allan's tone that reminded her of alarm bells. Something shrill. She looked to Buni. The bright-eyed little fellow was taking it all in.

"Check my harness, Jimmy," Allan said suddenly. The two men had donned their parachutes, and now they gave each other a final checking over. Sue was scared. But she mustn't let them know. She was scared because of the strange way Allan was acting. Until this minute she had be-

lieved he knew exactly where he was going and why. But now—

He leaned forward, his narrowed eyes combing the massive peaks that turned slowly beneath their plane.

"I remember these mountains perfectly," he said, "But where the devil did that come from?"

"What?"

"That tall spire of rock with the glass eye."

"What tall spire?"

"That shaft straight ahead. You'd better swing to the right. *Quick! To the right!*"

Sue obeyed without asking questions. Then to her consternation, a wave of colored light passed over the nose of the plane, and her own hands at the controls caught the swift change of colors. She looked to Allan. The lines of his tense face were highlighted with purple—and then pink—then orange! A whole rainbow of colors shone in from some unseen source.

"Don't you see it?" Allan shouted. "Look—that way! What a sight! What a hellova sight!"

Then the colored light was gone, and again they were flying through the clear blue air among sun-tinted clouds.

Allan bent to the window, trying to look back over the wing to the rear of the plane.

"I don't get it," Sue said.

Allan was as breathless as if he had been kicked in the chest by an elephant. His words were half whispers.

"Nobody will ever believe....that we....that we saw such a sight.... They just don't....they could never make diamonds that big! Not even imitations! It's unearthly! Where do you suppose it came from?"

Sue couldn't answer, for she hadn't seen a thing. The light, yes. The source of the light, no. And what was

this talk about a big diamond? She was exasperated, and she said so.

"If you'll please tell us what you're raving about, Captain, I'm sure we'll all appreciate it."

"You mean you didn't see that jewel as big as six hillboards?"

"I saw!" Buni piped up, his black eyes dancing with excitement. "I know what it is."

BUT SUE knew that Jimmy hadn't seen it, for his face wore the bewildered sag of a month-old jack-o'-lantern.

"Where did you see this?" Sue asked sharply. "Back in New York in Times Square?"

"It was there, just this minute, as plain as day," Allan snapped. "Are you blind?"

"It was *where*?"

"In the side of that tall shaft of rock we passed."

"I didn't even see any shaft of rock," Sue protested.

"Neither did I," said Jimmy.

Then Allan gulped. "You mean—wait a minute! You skimmed past so close that our left wing missed it by about ten feet. You didn't know?"

"Now he tells me!" Sue said. "Why don't I faint?"

"You saw it, didn't you, Buni?"

"Sure," the little fellow said. "That is the big window which the evil Scravvzek uses to see the world."

All at once Allan was a man afire with an inspiration to act. He ordered Sue to circle back. He appeared to know exactly where he wanted to go. And, to Sue's mounting consternation, he gauged all his directions by the shaft of rock that wasn't there!

He was talking fast. He was making ready to leap out the door. He was dispensing farewell advice right and left. He wouldn't take Jimmy along, he suddenly announced.

"You stay with Sue, Jimmy. I'll take the jump alone. I'll find your chief for you, Buni, and give him the token. So you stick close to Yippee. She'll need native help servicing her plane." Then he turned to Sue once again. "Don't wait more than two days for me at Bunjojop, Yippee. If I don't get back to the village on foot by that time, just cross me off your books."

"Meaning what?"

"Never mind. I'll try to square this with you in time—but don't wait."

"I'll wait a week," Sue said stubbornly.

"Don't do it. I may be here a long time."

Jimmy put in a protest. "Don't say it that way, Captain."

"That's the way it is, Jimmy. I've just had a crazy hunch that fortune teller was right. Those eighty dead men may not be dead after all. I'll know more as soon as I float down to the base of this—more elevation, Yippee. You've only got fifty feet clearance."

Sue gulped. "Clearance from what?"

"The shaft with the eye. The shaft that isn't there.... Here we come. So long, friends. Watch everything!"

Allan opened the door and leaped. A moment later his parachute had ballooned out full and he was floating down over the purple valley like a lazy yellow cloud.

Sue's knuckles were tight and she felt the clammy perspiration on her forehead. She echoed Allan's final words in a tone tinged with sarcasm.

"He says, 'Watch everything!' That's swell advice for us poor folks who can't see anything—except what's there. Hey! Jimmy! Where are you going?"

Jimmy was at the door. "I figure *he* needs watchin' more'n anything."

Sue shrugged and gave him a little farewell salute. "I knew you'd do it. Happy landings!"

"It was darned nice knowin' you, Miss Yippee." Then Jimmy opened the door and jumped.

SUE CIRCLED, gathering altitude as a precaution against unseen dangers. Buni, pressing his nose against the window, supplied in his broken English a regular radio narrator's description of the descent of the two parachutes.

"They pass through colored light again."

Yes, Sue agreed. She too saw the rainbow hues sweeping over the billowing parachutes.

"Now they go down, and down, and down, and down—"

"All right. Don't be a stuck record."

"—and down and down. They sink very slowly. Deep valley down there under the tall mountain."

"Now don't you start seeing it again."

"I see *into* it," Buni said, quite self-assured. "You see all the people *in* it?"

"Now stop that, Buni! Just tell me where our two men are. I've lost sight."

"They fall down into mountain. It swallow them up."

"Buni!"

The little fellow was thoroughly absorbed in what he seemed to be seeing, far down in the canyon below the plane.

"They still falling inside the hollow mountain. The people down there don't see. Nobody sees them come down."

"Stop it! Stop it!" Sue commanded. "I'm taking you right home. And if you say another word of foolishness,

"I'll wash your mouth with soap! You understand?"

Quick as a wink the dark-skinned boy shifted his tactics in the interests of safety.

"I don't see anything more." Then he added innocently, "I don't see captain landing on that big red floor inside the mountain. I don't see Jimmy land beside him—"

But by this time the plane had swooped down over the bank of mountain peaks on its way back to Bunjojop, and all of the things that Buni "didn't see" were lost in the distance.

CHAPTER IX

THE WORLD beneath the radiant mountain was running true to form on this particular morning. The sunshine streamed in through the transparent sides of the great mountain shaft, which was neither stone nor glass, though it appeared to possess some of the qualities of both. The material was translucent. In form it resembled slides of a gigantic candle adorned with streams of melted tallow frozen in fantastic designs. A thousand hues and tones were set ablaze by the morning sun and the light shone through to the vast spaces within. Across the red stone floor these patterns of light played their own fanciful games of crisscrossing, intensifying each other, cancelling each other, racing each other toward any chance goal, such as the white stone monument in the center of the floor, or one of the circular benches along the wall, or the sandalled foot of some dignitary who stood with a group of his fellows to discuss their favorite theme of how to hasten the self-destruction of the world.

In the presence of all this splendor of colored light and natural architecture, it might seem incongruous that

a guard, on duty at the foot of the shaft, should find no better occupation for his eyes than to close them in sleep.

The stupid fellow didn't sleep all the time, however. In his wakeful moments he drank. And when he had drunk deeply, he could again sleep with little likelihood of being disturbed.

This morning, as the men of the hollow mountain began to stir about, the guard under the shaft was aware that they were passing with more than ordinary briskness. In one of the adjoining halls there was to be a meeting this afternoon, and this event was already causing a flurry of footsteps.

The guard snuggled closer to his carved stone seat. He had spent some hours of honest toil, it may be said to his credit, in shaping the soft, sandy stone into a saucer-shaped lounge that accommodated his rotundity; and he had furnished the seat with a covering, upholstered with fiber from the African village of Bunjojop.

He was, officially speaking, a guard. of stone, whose overhead curves helped to resound his gentle snores. More or less unconsciously he reveled in this resonant music, for it added depth to his pleasure of sleeping.

He was, officially speaking, a guard. He was engaged in watching the shaft, and the duty might have been an important one if there had been any regular traffic from the outside world. The shaft served an important function in this undermountain realm. It might appear to be a huge tooth-shaped mountain peak. But by the very nature of its construction, it remained an open and a penetrable thing.

THE SHAFT was a freak of nature. In terms of everyday concepts of three dimensions and solid substances,

the shaft had no definable existence; and some scientists on the outside might have amassed arguments to prove that it simply did not exist either in time or space. The dwellers of these depths, however, who had come through death to rediscover a strange sort of life in these hidden palaces of rock, had adjusted themselves to things for which the accepted sciences could not account. They themselves might feel uneasy over the lack of rationalizations to explain themselves and their fate. But after all, here they were, dwelling in their own separate world—and liking it. And they could hardly deny their own existence.

They knew that, in the nature of things, the one passage through which visitors might enter, unobserved, was this penetrable shaft—this tall towering mountain peak.

Hence they had placed the guard in charge. Originally they had charged him, on pain of death, never to allow a stranger to pass through this vertical portal without reporting him to the Scravvzek's high officers.

The guard had always privately scoffed at this warning. Along with the other seventy-nine men who comprised the evil Scravvzek's society, he had already withstood death. That threat could never frighten him again.

During his two years of standing guard (or, more accurately, sitting guard) he had never had a customer.

It was still early morning when he was aroused by a superior officer who stopped to poke fun at him.

"Any invaders yet, General Snoozy?"

"Huh?"

"Too bad you're kept so busy. Need any help?"

"Umh." The guard yawned and would have closed his eyes, but the superior officer prodded him.

"There's a demonstration this afternoon. I came to tell you you could desert your post long enough to attend. Take a good half day off and see the show."

"What show?"

"What show! Go to sleep, snoozy. The mountain could cave in and you wouldn't know the difference."

Snoozy roused up and registered ambition. "Wanna drink?"

"Don't you know what's coming this afternoon? They're poisoning the tribe."

"Poison? Who?"

"The top staff. They've got the tribal pojaks already poisoned to the point of destruction. Now the tribe has been herded in, and they'll get their first taste this afternoon. You can watch it happen over at the Glass Arena."

The guard mumbled a question about the poison. Where would the top staff get any poison down in these mountains?

His superior officer laughed. "Not that kind of poison, you clod. This is Scravvzek poison—the kind he's been using for centuries. It ought to be good sport, watching the whole tribe break down under it."

THE SUPERIOR officer started to explain how the top staff had begun the experiment. But just then the sound of voices from the one of the wide stairways caused him to fall silent. He stood back in the shadows of the guard's alcove to watch the approach of a party.

"It's the chief of Bunjojop," he whispered.

The sleepy guard opened his eyes for a bleary glimpse.

Four of the Scravvzek's high officers—*White Sharks*, as they were popularly known—were accompanying the Chief, and they were acting

the part of cordial hosts.

The chief of Bunjojop wasn't enjoying it. In his own language he was saying to himself, "What are these schemers going to do with my people?"

He was a proud person. As a rule, white men had respected his dignity and his integrity. He had the solid backing of his provincial government. His own tribe had always been one hundred percent loyal. They never questioned his decisions.

"But what have the tribal gods done to me?" he wailed inwardly. He had been deceived into ordering his whole tribe into this hidden mountain retreat—and what was going to become of them?

This place was strange to him. All his life he had heard legends of the evil Scravvzek that dwelt somewhere in the towering mountain. Now, within the space of three days, the mountain at the very back door of his village had opened like a hungry mouth, and he and his tribe had walked in. What did it mean?

Marching along with his four escorts, the chief was inwardly rebelling at every step. Suddenly he stopped and whirled about. His spinning caused streaks of light, reflected from the tiny mirrors in his high brass crown, to flash around the wide room.

"Walking too fast for you, chief?" one of the White Sharks asked. "Short-winded, eh? Are all of you African kings built like beer barrels?"

"He's looking for someone," another White Shark suggested, adjusting his starched white tunic. "What do you need, chief? Your whole tribe's down here inside the Scravvzek mountain. You know that, or at least you should. All of you came together except the

tribal pojaks who were already here."

"One boy is missing," the chief said, restraining the anxiety in his low, mellow voice.

"How could that be? We had you count them personally when they came in."

"I sent one out."

THIS ADMISSION jolted the White Sharks. The chief felt their glares, and he knew he was no guest, but a prisoner.

"Oh, so you sent one out! Why? Asking for help? Sending a message, no doubt. To whom?"

"I only sent for a token—a gift for the Scravvzek."

"Oh, a gift." The White Sharks, exchanging glances, shook their heads. The Scravvzek wouldn't be bought off with any gifts, not if they knew his purpose correctly.

"What is your gift?" One of them asked.

"A coin with an eagle."

"Gold?"

"Silver. It is American and it has magic power. It makes friends for me."

"Ho! He must mean an American dollar. Where did you get it, Chief?"

"Have you heard of Captain Burgess?"

"Heard of him? Hell, yes. He was the one that drove us into this devilish mess. So that's where your dollar came from! Well, take our word for it, Chief, the captain is thousands of miles away. He hasn't any power over us. Hell, he wouldn't weigh a grain of sand to the Scravvzek!"

The chief felt that the last solid ground was melting away beneath his feet; figuratively speaking. But he straightened, drew a proud breath, and uttered a speech, partly in English and partly in his native tribal

language, expressing the hope that his fribe would be released soon.

"We'll give you ^{the} dues, all right," one of the White Sharks said with a wink. "But don't be counting on any magic coins to buy you out of our good graces. An American dollar doesn't have any hocus pocus down here. Come on."

"I hope my hoy comes back safe," said the chief, glancing back toward the stairs.

They ushered him on.

The officer who had listened from the guard's alcove chuckled over the delicious earful he had picked up in passing. He went on his way, and the guard, after treating himself to a drink, resumed his sleep.

The big empty hall beneath the mountain shaft was again quiet.

CHAPTER X

THE PARACHUTE had opened like a full blown rose and Allan Burgess was descending slowly. Already the roar of the plane was fading away into the distance.

The mountain air was clear and cold, and Allan inhaled deeply of the thin odors of frosty ozone. His breathing was paced by excitement—an eagerness that had been accumulating ever since his visit with Madam Lasanda. At last the moment of discovery was near at hand.

Excitement was an emotional state he preferred never to reveal in the presence of others. It could too easily be mistaken for panic. He well remembered the day that he had forced a hundred men up through these rugged mountains. It had been a superhuman task to keep them moving along the suicidal trail. Their fears had seemingly paralyzed them, and at times mysterious invisible

forces had tried to turned them back. With almost superhuman will power he had driven them on. Those who had gone wild with terror and had tried to dodge past him he had shot dead. Ten of them. And seventy others had unaccountably gone down over the precipice, as if dropping from the side of a sinking ship.

And yet the remaining twenty had fought on and accomplished the mission.

Eighty out of a hundred lost!

The bitterness of that awful event swept over Allan now as he looked down upon the purple-ridged mountains of tragedy. His pulses were throbbing. There it had happened. But the scene had changed.

What was this new towering spire-shaped mountain? Where had it come from? Was it only a figment of his feverish imagination—something rising out of his tortured memories? A tombstone for eighty dead men—was that it?

The point of the great spire was rising toward him. He guided his parachute to the right. At once he was skimming down past the lofty point. This was the front side, in which the great blazing gem was set. He was floating down toward it. In another moment its colorful glow would catch him.

Was the plane coming back?

He heard it roaring over again and saw its shadow leap across the tower of stone. A twinge of conscience caught him for a brief moment. He had left the party abruptly. When Sue Carson gave him one of those looks as if she expected some sort of goodbye, he might have at least patted her hand. And Jimmy—well, Allan knew he had cut Jimmy right through the heart by suddenly telling him not to come along.

But Jimmy had not been able to see this mighty mountain spike. *Why?*

Allan, floating downward, studied the massive thing for its elements of reality. Once for an instant he seemed to be seeing down through its thousand-foot depth—and those tiny moving figures down there were men, dwelling within it.

But the mountain spire, which for a long moment seemed steamy and unreal, now began to darken into a solid, opaque form as it rose higher. Its thousands of stony spears pushed up out of the misty valley and silhouetted themselves against the morning sky.

THE COUNTLESS facets of the gigantic "diamond" which hung against the side of the shaft, began to glare, hot and bright, against Allan's cheeks. He guided his parachute outward. The stabbing light was too intense. In terms of sound it would have been a deafening roar from a sustained explosion. As light, it was silent, yet the explosive quality was there in an almost blinding effect. Allan tightened his eyes against the brilliance.

Later he would try to guess the meaning of this giant of light. Later he would recall the accurate symmetrical cut, patterned after the "brilliant" design of a polished gem. At the moment it was enough to endure the fury of its merciless blaze. Yet he couldn't take his eyes off of it.

There is something about a precious stone, he thought. He had heard tales of men in the diamond trade whose passions were so completely wrapped up in the glitter of gems that the glow of a perfect stone would virtually hypnotize them. What Allan was seeing in this strange moment

would fill his mind's eye for hours to come.

The heat diminished. He had fallen past. His forehead ached and his eyes swam with color, and he felt that millions of unknown rays had passed through his body as if he were a vacuum.

Where was he falling? He tried to drift farther outward, knowing that the widening cone of the great shaft would presently obstruct his descent. He tried to look down, but he was still seeing color and more color, like fiery knife blades in his eyes.

He never knew just when he fell into the shaft. At some point during his descent he must have encountered its spear-like sides, but he kept going down and down. Presently he saw that the walls were all around him—filmy, translucent walls that shielded his burning eyes from the blazing out-of-doors. The light that seeped in was softened by the hues and tints of the mystical substances that formed the spire. Slits served as fantastic windows. The stone-like walls were thickening around him, with a weird candle-drip effect.

He had somehow entered, and now he was drifting down through the hollow tower toward a red stone floor a few hundred feet below. Down... down...down...

A vast red-rock room was opening. The ribs of the great hollow tower above it brought streams of light down, like massive veins of lucite.

Allan swept the wide floor with his eyes, looking for any signs of the people which he had once glimpsed. The room appeared to be an empty cathedral, ornamented with the weird and fanciful tracery that only nature can provide. Giant

stalagmites projected upward from the floor. One of the smaller of these rock formations, about fifty feet tall, rose toward Allan, and a current of air swung his parachute over it. His descent ended with a jerk.

He drew himself onto a small ledge that provided footing while he disentangled himself from his harness. He worked quietly, keeping an ear on the alert for something more than the hollow echoes of the great cavernous room.

What he heard was a swish of silk, only a few feet beyond the stalagmite to which he had anchored.

The sound, so close at hand, startled him. He tried to peer around the post of stone without losing his footing.

Then came a familiar voice.

"Wait fer me, Captain!"

"You Jimmy! I thought I told you—"

"It was that hig diamond, Captain. After I finally saw it, it pulled me right out of the plane, gosh-ding-it. I never aimed to—"

Jimmy stopped to catch his breath. Allan could see only his perspiring pumpkin face and one arm fighting the air. Yards of parachute silk had settled over him.

"Be with you in a minute, Captain. I anchored too quick and got my sails tangled. Say, what dya make of this port, Captain? Ain't this a honey? If those eighty dead men are hurried here, believe me, they've got a mighty fancy restin' place."

CHAPTER XI

"WHAT are you clawing the air for?" Allan asked in a low voice.

"Spots," said Jimmy. "I keep seein' 'em in front of my eyes. As one

leopard said to the other leopard—"

"S-s-s-sh! Not so loud."

"Have you seen anybody?"

"Not yet. That is, not since I came down through. Once when I was about a thousand feet up I thought I had a glimpse. Just now this looks like the emptiest place I ever fell into."

Jimmy clawed at the air. "Spots. Spots. Wasn't that the dangdest biggest hunk o' cut glass you ever saw in your life?"

"That's what I kept telling you."

"I couldn't see it at first. I kept seein' the light, but I didn't see any hig tower of stone—or rock candy—or what the devil ever it is—until I started sailing down. What's come over us, Captain? This ain't the way it was when we marched up the trail on that do-or-die mission."

Allan didn't have any ready answers. The best he could do was try to adjust his eyes to the deep colors of the vast cavernous room, gradually making out the avenues that tunneled off into the darkness. It was a world of almost perfect silence, he thought at first.

However, after they had packed their parachutes away and treated themselves to a lunch they had brought from Bunjopop, they were more alert to the details of their surroundings.

"Hear that soft hum? There it comes again," Allan said.

"Somebody's goin' zoom, zoom, zoom on his big hass viol," Jimmy suggested.

They caught their bearings to make sure they wouldn't get lost from each other. Five purple stalagmites grouped together like an old man's hand became their home base. Allan decided to call it the west side of the immense red-rock room. "Do you see

it as west?" he asked Jimmy; but Jimmy said all he saw was spots.

They climbed down from the "Old Man's Hand" and moved on tip-toe in search of the source of the rhythmic humming. At the same time Allan cast about for signs of the trail that had surely led along through this area. He couldn't find any signs of it. His first guess, that the towering shaft with the big diamond must have been "constructed" over the trail somehow, during the past two years, didn't satisfy his curiosity over the matter.

"If I could get up to one of those streaks of light, I might be able to look down on the old pass."

"I don't figure you could see through any of that stained glass," Jimmy said.

"Maybe I could break a hunk of it out," Allan suggested. Then he looked up and up, through the hollow spire within which he had descended. It all looked pretty fragile. He saw Jimmy shaking his head dubiously. "Does it look as shaky to you as it does to me?"

"All I see is spots," said Jimmy. "Listen. The bass viol—"

"All right, we'll see if we can locate it," Allan decided he had just as well pass over the mystery of the colossal diamond in the tower for the present. As long as the thing stood there, a solid enclosure, towering hundreds of feet above this cavernous world, bringing streams of light down into the darkness, he had better accept its benefits without troubling it. Still, he had a lingering curiosity to know what he would have seen if he had fallen on the outside. Were the skeletons of his eighty men out there somewhere, their white bones hanging over the spears of colored stone?

Or were the eighty here—*within* the mountain—*alive*—as Madam Lamsanda had predicted?

Could it be that that tantalizing glimpse, from a thousand feet up, of dozens of human beings coming and going through these avenues of stone, was a glimpse of the eighty? *Could it be?*

"There's your bass viol," Jimmy whispered. He pointed.

In the small alcove lay a ragged, unshaven man, sound asleep. He was coiled into a comfortable ball, and the saucer-like curve of his stone nest was well suited to his rotund form. This, Allan thought, is the way a cave-dwelling man would look if nature had given him the task of sitting on eggs and hatching human chicks.

This mass of lazy flesh was hatching nothing more than snores. He was an artist at snoring, Allan thought. The curve of the ceiling above his head resounded his favorite music.

Allan and Jimmy moved closer. Jimmy whispered, "Look, Captain. It's one of our gang!"

The chills struck through Allan's spine. Jimmy was right.

"It's Gallagher!"

The man's face was bloated from drink, and his sleeping eyes were puffy. But he was recognizable in spite of the changes. The very purring action of his lips brought back his familiar look.

"It's Gallagher," Allan repeated in half whisper. "He's a different Gallagher, but that's who it is. By the devils of bell, it's him, and he's alive and breathing."

"I see him," Jimmy said without any breath at all. "An' it ain't spots in front of my eyes. It's Gallagher!"

CHAPTER XII

GALLAGHER was only the beginning. Within the next two hours, before the big troubles began to fall on them, Allan and Jimmy were to identify several others. Some by sight. Others by voice. To Allan it was as if grass-grown graves had opened up, and the dead men had stepped out and paraded past.

Allan preferred not to linger long at Gallagher's station.

"Aren't we gonna wake him up, Captain?" Jimmy asked.

The snoring heap gave a snort and a groan and opened one eye. "Go way, lemme be... I'm not 'sleep. I'm watchin' everything. Don'cha worry. Everything's unner control."

"Take it easy," Allan said, putting a hand on his shoulder. "We'll get you out of this prison before long."

"Huh? Who's sayin' what? Listen, Cappen, who says this is a prison? Huh? An' who says I want out?"

"Never mind, Gallagher. If the rest of the crew are on hand, I'll organize them and we'll all find a way out soon."

"What for? Who's kickin'? I ain't kickin', am I?"

"Take it easy," Allan said, "I'll see you later."

"S'all right, Cappen, 's'all right. See ya at that Glass Arena, Cappen. Better git yer uniform, Cappen. Ain't got much time. Show starts at two, y'know."

The drunken guard's monolog trailed off into something incomprehensible. But "Captain" Allan Burgess had found his first living proof of the fortune teller's prediction. A solid responsibility loomed before him. He crooked a finger at Jimmy, and they tiptoed across the wide red-rock room and ducked into

the first shadows that the irregular walls afforded.

"Gosh-digety-whoosh!" Jimmy gasped. "He was three-fourths asleep an' four-fifths drunk, and he still knew you was his captain, right off after two years. He knew with only one eye open."

Allan frowned. His offer of good will had been rebuffed quite bluntly. He wondered how much Gallagher would remember when he came out of his drunken stupor.

"What was he sayin' about the show?"

"Whatever it is," Allan said, "we'd better plan to be there. We've got some things to learn about this place. We'd just as well start with the Glass Arena."

"First feature starts at two, Captain. Gee, I wish Sue Carson was here."

Allan felt Jimmy's eyes searching him for a response.

"Don't you, Cap?" Jimmy pursued. "Don't you kinda miss that gal already?"

"She'll get back to Bunjojop okay, don't worry. And she'll have Bunj. But we'll try to get word through to her as soon as we can. There's got to be a whole Bunjojop tribe around here somewhere."

"Maybe at the Glass Arena?"

"That's my hunch too. If we can find the chief, we'll get him to send out another scout to report our safe arrival."

That appeared to ease Jimmy's worries. The deep shadowed lines of his fat bronzed face softened. "She'll be glad to know, Captain. An' I reckon she'll be all right."

THEY STARTED their course in a very general way. The Old Man's Hand was to serve as home

hase. Keeping well out of the gaze of Gallagher, who was apparently stationed as a guard in the big red room below the tower, they would explore the tunnelled avenues first to the west, then to the north.

Footsteps and voices broke in upon their plans. Six men came sauntering along through one of the avenues. The two in the lead were urging the others to hurry along, while one talkative fellow in the center of the group was trying to tell a funny story.

"That guy!" Jimmy whispered.

"Keep hidden," Allan advised.

"That guy has told that same story fifty times!"

Allan was breathing hard. His men! The same men who had served under him on board ship, who had been picked for the most unusual naval mission deep in this black continent. His men, whose lives had ended over a precipice!

"Lee, Urney, Olson, McAllister!" Allan whispered. "Smith and—"

"Ain'tcha goin' to step out an' make 'em salute?"

"Not till I know my grounds," Allan retorted. "Let's don't begin by bungling things."

He observed their casual manners, their seeming lightheartedness, their unchanged habits of speech. Only their clothing was different. They wore sandals, light weight trunks and shirts, and leather belts from which a few tools or a coil of rope might hang. The shirts may have been a regulation uniform for these parts, Allan decided. They were green with a diagonal stripe of white; or they were dun colored, with a reddish brown triangle across the chest. The uniform of Gallagher, the guard, belonged in the latter category, unless its soiled and sandy condition put it in a class by itself.

"Listen," Jimmy whispered, "More talk about the Glass Arena."

The six men walked through the wide room, and once the story teller had finished, one of the others moved the party along by reminding them there was work to be done at the Glass Arena.

Allan and Jimmy followed them, keeping to the shadows. The avenue to the east of the red room curved and narrowed and darkened. Through purple light, the six men ahead became dim shadows. It was growing darker. Rocky obstructions hampered their progress. One needed to know the better paths through this jungle trail of fantastically shaped stones.

Other voices were coming, now, from somewhere in the rear. Allan and Jimmy hid back in the blackness and waited while two more parties passed.

"Jordan," Allan whispered tensely. "And that's Roderick and Brock with him."

"The same old trio," Jimmy breathed. "Can you see 'em?"

"Just the outline."

"Jordan's still got that same hunch to his walk..."

Minutes later, as Allan and Jimmy moved on into the increasing darkness, they paused to hear sounds of voices from a new direction. Not from the avenue of deep purple light, but seemingly from somewhere above.

They crowded against a wall, and moved along from one niche to another, now in utter blackness, groping toward the source of the sounds. The voices had echoed dimly and had passed. But now more were coming.

Voices but no footsteps.

Allan cupped his ears toward the blackness over his head. Voices glided closer, in a jumble of echoes. Then

for a moment they were clear and close, and he caught a wisp of some trifling conversation. And Jimmy might whisper, "That guy! And *him*, too. Same pair. Don't he ever change stooges?"

BY THIS time the voices would have glided away into a low rumble of echoes, and presently they were swallowed up in silence.

Allan patted the wall around him. He struck a match, but extinguished it instantly. More voices were drifting in.

"There's a gash in the wall up there," Jimmy volunteered. "Anyway there was a barrel-sized hunk of black."

Allan's quick glimpse bore out Jimmy's observation, except in matters of dimension. "I'd have said keg-sized. Anyway, there's an opening into another room or something."

"Air shaft, ya reckon?"

Allan chuckled. "Whoever put this mountain together specialized in honeycombs. It heats me how this all came about."

"I figure there must have been a big artesian well, full of plastic, or somethin', that busted loose soon after we was here. It all fountained up and spilled over like a meltin' candle, and every place that used to be valley got covered over into a big room. D'ya reckon?"

"S-s-sh! More voices."

"Stapleton... Underhill... Jennings..."

"We're calling the roll of the dead," Allan said more to himself than to Jimmy.

"What'd you say, Cap?"

"Nothing." Allan's answers weren't clicking. It was too easy for Jimmy to ask questions. Calling the roll of the dead, Allan kept seeing the old

tortured visual image he'd carried for the past two years. It was an image of mangled bodies lying at the foot of the deep precipice. An image of men falling, as if slipping off the side of a sinking ship. An image of uniforms decaying under the swirl of snow, the whipping wind, the torrents of rain, the blistering sun.

"I know what you're thinkin', Captain," Jimmy said very quietly. "Gosh-ding-it, if we hadn't seen those first few, we wouldn't be too sure about these."

"What do you mean?"

"Maybe these is nothin' but voices, still echoin'." Jimmy gave an audible gulp at the thought. "But how do we know, we're gittin' nothin' but voices, now. We can't even hear 'em walk. *How do we know?*"

CHAPTER XIII

ALLAN agreed that they needed to be seen. He was especially anxious to see some of the ten he had shot down. And above all, he hoped to get one of these men aside and find out what the score was before he revealed himself to the whole crowd.

"I don't blame you," Jimmy said. "No tellin' how they may feel toward their ex-captain—especially those you shot."

"I don't expect to be popular."

"They may pounce on you like a pack of wolves. But you're the captain. And I notice you still carry your pistol handy."

Allan had been careful to arm himself and Jimmy with a little pint-sized artillery; but he wasn't placing much store by his firearms. He didn't know whether they would have any value whatsoever in this region.

"We've got to get onto the rules, Jimmy," he said. "If we can bump

into Doc Pakkerman, I might get the dope from him as easy as anyone. He had a blunt way about him. His brain had taken a jolt somewhere along the line. But he had flashes of being smarter than any of us. Do you remember Doe?"

"Do I remember Doc!" Jimmy waxed enthusiastic, and Allan had to hush him. Doc Pakkerman had once been Jimmy's Maple City hero, and he whispered to Allan the story of how he had been wishing he could carry on for Doe the night he had bumped into the mayor and the Yip-pee Girl. "Gosh, if we can git Doc on our side, he'll give us a key to the city."

"This way," Allan said, leading on into the darkness. He was determined that there must be a way to the avenue of voices. The dimly reflected light showed ridges of dark green floor stones back down the trail, and he heard Jimmy muttering to himself that that was the way back to the Old Man's Hand.

"Stay with me and we won't get lost," Allan said with exaggerated confidence. "Here, this leads up."

"I've found a path over here, Captain."

"This way, Jimmy." Then Allan stopped. "Bum steer. Dead end. S-s-sh! More voices coming. I'll go back where I was. . . Coming, Jimmy?"

"Huh? What'd you say? Where are you?"

Jimmy's call sounded faint, as if through a partition of thin stone. Allan couldn't respond at once, for there were other voices moving close, as before. No steps, but approaching voice. Voices out of the black recesses somewhere overhead. They were passing. They gradually faded into meaningless echoes.

"Do we dare light a light, Cap?"

That was Jimmy's voice again!

"Where are you?" Allan had an uncomfortable hunch that Jimmy was somewhere above him. The voice was close, yet Jimmy had certainly gone the other way. Allan reached for his cigaret lighter. Instead, he found a forgotten packet of matches. "Where are you?"

"Cap, I've got a feeling this floor is moving. Where are you?"

"Right where I was. Jimmy! Where are you going? You're fading! Are you up there in the shadows?"

"Don't walk out on me Captain. I'm sittin' right here. . . Or am I movin'?" Jimmy's voice trailed off. Allan barely caught the last faint call. "Hellooo-o-o-o-o-o!"

Then Jimmy was gone.

Allan had lost three matches trying to strike a light. Now he succeeded. He caught a glimpse of the green and black walls of stone close around him. Some four or five feet above his head was a niche in the perpendicular wall large enough that a child might have crawled through. Allan clampered upward. His light went out. He struck another, regained his footing, then caught a hand over the edge of the opening so that he could chin himself, then hooked his elbows on another edge. Thus suspended for a moment, he ceased to breath long enough to listen.

"Whissssh!"

IT WAS a sound so faint that he compared it to a kitten's breathing. A continuous, smooth, gliding sound. He thought of liquid flowing. Of sand sifting. Of a serpent crawling. That faint "whissssh" of some sort just beyond the range of his vision. The match flickered out. Hanging on with one arm, he managed to light a third match. He

headlines—the next morning's.

Yippee had not been murdered. She had not been kidnapped. She had *eloped*. That is, it had been suggested by usually reliable sources that she may have eloped.

"RUMOR YIPPEE ELOPES WITH EX-CAPTAIN."

"HINTS YIPPEE ELOPED WITH BLIND DATE."

Some of the papers, however, applied more imagination to the possibilities, and suggested that rumors were being checked regarding her elopement with the mayor of Maple City, with the president of the chamber of commerce, with a petty thief, with a prominent state governor. Columnists threw in Kilroy and the Statue of Liberty for good measure. Then—

"YIPPEE LAST SEEN AT PARTY WITH MAPLE CITY 'BOYS'."

The mayor of Maple City was already squirming before that headline appeared. With this fresh turn or rumors, however, he began to dodge and leap about as if expecting momentarily to be struck by lightning. The "boys" must be protected at all costs. He didn't care to have their activities tossed about in the limelight.

"I'll get my hands on this newspaper story and see that it turns in the right direction," he promised the "boys."

"Then you'd better act fast. The public gets stirred up easy, you know," one of his cronies advised.

"I've got the trick that will quiet them long enough to let me dig into a certain angle." He reached for his telephone and called for the city editor. Then— "Joe? Mayor Channing. Listen, Joe. Why don't you fire your half-witted reporter and take your

facts from me. This disappearance of Yippee is a cooked-up publicity gag. What else could it be?... Of course, I know what I'm talking about. Wasn't I with her the night before?... Sure, I know you want a more exciting angle, but—but—"

"Don't let him outtalk you, boss," The mayor was getting plenty of advice from the sidelines.

"But that's my angle." The mayor managed to say. "I know Madam Lasanda talked with Burgess shortly before he took off. That's my angle....How did I know it? How?"

"Tell him you read it in the papers, boss," came from the sidelines.

"I read it in the papers, Joe... Well, don't fire your half-witted reporter, then. But let me handle this Madam Lasanda thing.... Why? Because I've got her on the spot already... This license deal...No, I'll take care of it personally."

A few minutes later he called his secretary at the city hall. "I want you to phone to Madam Lasanda, the fortune teller, and 'invite' her to appear at my office in an hour. She is about to be granted a personal interview with the mayor. Tell her that, and try not to sound too sarcastic about it."

Five minutes later the secretary called back.

"Mr. Channing? Madam Lasanda said she wasn't in the mood for an interview, thank you. She's very busy with clients."

"Busy, is she? Call back and tell her this is a matter of business and it's urgent."

"I told her that, Mr. Channing."

"Ugh? What did she say?"

"She said that unless it was a court order or an arrest, she wasn't obliged to come. She's going to lose her license, so she's making bay while the

hands seized him. It was Lieutenant Sully's sandpaper shriek of excitement. And the swinish grunt of Sully's sidekick, Lieutenant Bandyworth. Allan groaned to remember his last encounter with these two men. Bullets through the hearts of each! Bullets, without which the mission would have been lost!

A flare of yellowish light blinded his eyes. He was reeling, almost fainting, clutching his head. But with the advantage of light, he regained partial control of himself. The faces of Sully and Bandyworth showed in the weird greenish light reflected from the walls. Bandy held the flashlight.

Allan's left hand flew up in a gesture that demanded a *halt!* His right hand dived for his pistol.

At the same time Sully was shouting.

"Invaders, by the devil! Grab him there!"

They plunged toward Allan. His gun hand whipped into action fast enough to have frozen an ordinary assailant. He barked an order for them to freeze or he'd shoot. They didn't freeze. He shot three times, and the blasts echoed in the walls like cannons. THWANG-WANG-WANG-wang-wang! The last wanging echoes were swallowed up in the grating laughter of Lieutenant Sully.

"Shoot, you devil! We've been shot before!"

Sully sliced the air with his rope, and the frayed end lashed Allan's cheek. Allan flung his gun. Both men should have been doubling up on the floor with bullets in their bellies. But here was the screaming fact, cutting through his own mind like gunfire. These men were *immune* to bullets. Once they had fallen before his fire, but they wouldn't fall a second time. Some power outside the

realm of common knowledge had taken them in for protection.

They pounced on him, and Bandyworth swung the flaring light into his eyes, so that he didn't see the club-like weapon that Sully used to strike him down.

He crumpled in pain. As the blackness swept in upon his ebbing consciousness, he heard Sully say, "Well, by the gods of Bunjojop, if it isn't that damned captain that gave me a lungful of lead! Look Bandy! This is rich! This is pickin's! The Scravvzek'll have a holiday over this. This is what I'd call—"

And then Allan fell off into a faint that spared him further words of mockery.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ABRUPT disappearance of the Yippee Girl, following her performance at Maple City, U. S. A., made plentiful headlines over the continent of North America.

"WHERE IS YIPPEE GIRL?" the newspapers blazed.

"RUMOR YIPPEE KID-NAPPED."

"REPORT YIPPEE FLIGHT TO AFRICA."

The first day's headlines were the worst, and the reader who tried to follow them with any geographical logic would have circumnavigated the globe two or three times at one sitting. Yippee was believed to have departed for South America. For Paris. For the Cape of Good Hope. For Sidney. For the North Pole—or the South!

Yippee was believed also to have been victimized by thugs in the city of Chicago; in Maple City; in Jacksonville; in Havana.

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headlines—the next morning's.

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"I told her that, Mr. Channing."
"Ugh? What did she say?"

"She said that unless it was a court order or an arrest, she wasn't obliged to come. She's going to lose her license, so she's making hay while the

sun shines. Her time is for clients only."

"Ugh! Ummm." The mayor waved his cronies away from the phone. "All right, damn it. Make an appointment for me. I'll go to see her, as a client."

CHAPTER XV

THE MAYOR forgot the lines he rehearsed for Madam Lasanda's benefit as soon as he entered her darkened room. The bright jewels in the Oriental mosques around the wall fairly leaped out at him. And before he had gotten used to them, the low rhythmic blaze of Ksentajaiboa was before him. The little Egyptian fire tender waved his arm—it seemed to the mayor that each time he hesitated for the right word, the little fellow waved. Like a director waving his baton at a lagging musician.

"Madam Lasanda, as I was saying—"

"Please make yourself comfortable, Mayor Channing."

"Comfortable, huh! As I was saying—"

"Would you care for a cup of tea?"

"Tea?"

"Many clients enjoy tea while we talk."

"Oh, the devil. All right, tea." Mayor Channing was forced to admit to himself that the pictures of Madam Lasanda didn't do her justice. The color photo of her that adorned the wall of the most popular photographic studio had attracted a great deal of comment. And the mayor recalled that he had always stolen a glance at it when passing. But the luscious colors that now played over her face, as the flame waved before her, were something to see. The sight

of her, looking at him out of her deep shining dark eyes, gave him a strange physical sensation.

He accepted the tea from her servant, who disappeared behind the red velvet portieres, and then he faced her. He gave a determined thrust to his jaw.

"As a fortune teller, you can no doubt answer any question I ask."

"You flatter me, Mayor Channing." She gave a casual smile. "With the ax hovering over my license, you still believe my talent capable of reaching for the unknown."

"No flattery intended." He reached for his billfold. She lifted a finger to restrain him.

"What is your question?"

The mayor cleared his throat. "Where is Yippec?"

She tilted her head back, so that the smile from her eyes appeared to play over him indulgently. She nodded slowly.

"All the newspapers in the country are burning up to know. The entertainment agencies are buzzing like mad hornets to find out what's happened. It's the million dollar question, Mr. Mayor."

Again the mayor reached for his billfold, and again the flick of a finger stopped him.

"Ah, but you get your answer free! Where is Yippec? At this moment—" Madam Lasanda hesitated to let her eyes dwell pleasantly on the busy fire tender, long enough to exchange a secret smile—"she is in the heart of Africa."

"The heart. Umm. Kind of indefinite."

"Where the waterways of the sea meet the towers of the sky."

"Umm. From the sea to the mountain, huh? Do I find that on the map?"

The response was a raised eyebrow. Then a slight shrug. Then—"Look for the Zamtolor region... The little mining village of Bunjojop... Above the lake.... Beneath the eye."

"The eye—e—ye—eye?"

"Aye," she nodded with a faint smile.

The mayor jotted the information in his notebook "Er—there must have been a good reason for going to this particular place."

AFTER he had said it he was rather surprised at the tone of respect in his voice. The boys would have nudged each other if they had been here to see him drinking in these words from a fortune teller. Probably whole cloth. Still—

"The man she went with," she added, "was a client of yours, I understand. Maybe you had something to do with sending them."

Her answer was fascinating. "I am rather proud to say that I know how to choose my men."

"Hmnn?" He looked up at her from under his eyebrows, and saw that she was bestowing a very direct and intimate gaze upon him. He drew a deep breath. "You mean—"

"I chose him—Allan Burgess—as a man capable of going to Africa on an important errand. I merely threw the hint in his path. He didn't stop to ask too many questions. He picked up the first plane he could get."

"Yippee's. I see."

"But her going—that wasn't a part of my plan." Madam Lasanda rose and walked across the dark room. "I'm not to be blamed for that."

The mayor thought he had been given his cue to leave; but the questions still tantalized him. Something was going on over in Africa, he didn't know what. He couldn't help

wondering if he was one of those men she could choose unerringly—a man of action who knew the importance of a challenge—a man who wouldn't stop to ask too many questions.

Questions. He fumbled at the leaves of his notebook, he had other questions on his list that had slipped his mind for the moment.

"Your next question," Madam Lasanda volunteered, "is—will Yippee get back safely?"

He gulped. "How did you know? Mirrors?"

"Mirrors of the mind, Mayor Channing. But as to your question—ah, me! Here my deep pessimism comes to the surface. What difference does it make about Yippee?"

"What difference?"

"We are all headed for destruction. You and your boys should be aware of the direction we're going. I happen to know that some of the deadly power which is carrying us along comes from the Zamtolor region, above the village of Bunjojop, above the lake, beneath the eye."

"Destruction? Deadly power?"

"Neither Yippee nor Allan Burgess nor any other ambassadors of good will are likely to make much difference."

Mayor Channing was on his feet. All this talk of destruction was making things whirl in his mind. The added mention of his political friends gave him a flare of temper. He barked:

"How do you know all this?"

"Sit down Mayor Channing. Have some more tea, and I'll tell you how I know." She filled his cup. Sitting across the little table from him, she spoke in a low, nicely modulated voice. "I once had a very good friend by the name of Doctor Val Pakker-man."

"Ughh? You?"

"Doe Pakkerman, they called him. You remember him well. He was one of the nation's most useful scientists. And a good citizen. He was smart enough and strong enough that he would have cleaned up this town—including your boys—if certain ugly fates hadn't thrown him out the window. Later, Pakkerman was lost in the Dark Continent. I lost a man—a friend. The city lost a reformer. The nation lost a scientist of great value. And the world lost an idealist. And your boys—what did they gain?"

The mayor reddened. "Let's don't get into personalities."

"That's a very lame answer, mayor Channing. You're perspiring, aren't you? Very well, Pakkerman was gone. And let us say that the world felt just a little loss. Just a little. The world is big, and Pakkerman was only one man. But I missed him."

MADAM looked steadily at the little Egyptian fire tender, and the light came and went in her deep eyes. She inhaled slowly.

"So... I went to Africa. No reason, you might say. Restlessness, perhaps." Then her voice suddenly strengthened with ominous overtones. "I visited Africa and I learned about a mysterious evil power. *The Scravvzek*... *The Evil Scravvzek*. It's something legendary that the native tribes have feared for centuries."

She paused, and her head tilted back slowly, and her eyes narrowed. She continued:

"It's only a name to you, Mayor Channing. But I see you are not smiling. Nor will you smile when I tell you that the influence of this force finds its way all around the world. It is growing more active daily. By leaps and bounds it spreads to far

away places. And it may seem strange to you that Maple City should be so easily found by the hand of the Scravvzek, reaching around the world. But there is a reason."

"You mean—you mean that this thing is going to descend upon Maple City?"

"As to that, the future will tell. But just now the Scravvzek is recruiting evil helpers. It may borrow some of your Maple City talents, shall we say? Your 'boys' are the sort of helpers the Scravvzek can use. Don't be surprised if some of them decide to take a trip. By the way, have you talked with your friend Bill Gavor recently?"

"Gavor's off on a vacation."

Madam Lasanda gave a knowing smile. "To Africa, perhaps?"

"Africa? Bill Gavor?"

"Didn't he mention something about the big game hunting?"

"Yes, come to think of it. By George, come to think of it—"

"Where is your friend Charley this evening?"

"Charley? Oh, he's over at the club."

"Are you sure? Would you like to telephone to see if he's still there?" Madam Lasanda made little curving motions with her fingers and then gently reached to the wall. She handed him the phone.

A moment later he was talking with the receptionist at the club. "What do you mean, Charley isn't there?... Left, did he?... *On a trip? TO AFRICA!!!*" The mayor slammed down the phone, gave a savage grunt, and slapped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Not there, Mayor Channing?" Madam Lasanda asked sweetly.

"Not there."

"Gone—on a trip?"

"He's going. Took a sudden notion. Went home to pack. Going by plane. Going to Africa, damn it."

"As I say, the Evil Scravvzek is looking for 'talent'... Is anyone going with him?"

"I didn't ask."

"Would you like to call back, May-or Channing? Maybe some of the other boys will be taking sudden notions too. You know how a thing like that spreads."

"Damn it! Maybe I'll go too. Give me that phone."

CHAPTER XVI

ALLAN was jostled back to consciousness. He fought out of his painful dream that someone was striking him on the ears with an automobile tire. His head was throbbing. His eyes opened cautiously to see the surface of a golden brown army blanket in which he was being carried.

Four men were carting him along through an avenue of rocks somewhat brighter than the last he had seen. All four men wore glistening white uniforms. Men in white, he thought. Was this a parade or a burial?

They were talking. Old familiar voices, low and sinister. Mumbings whose meanings he wasn't supposed to catch.

"Careful what you say, there. He's stirring."

"We'll dump him in a cell and let him stir."

"Listen who's gagging."

"Cut the puns. We'll be late for the show."

They were coming into more pink light. Again Allan thought that the glass-like veins must be leading light down from the out-of-doors. Lucite? He wondered what it would be like

after sundown. Probably black, the way it was after they clubbed him.

With his eyes squinted open, he watched the thick, broad-shouldered form of Lieutenant Sully, jogging along with one hand on a corner of the blanket. Bouncing from Sully's side was a two-foot piece of what appeared to be heavy rubber hose, metal-reinforced.

So Sully carried an extra badge of authority in this region!

The starchy white tunics identified these four men as "White Sharks." There were ten White Sharks, Allan gathered—those ten men whom he had shot. They comprised a special class of clique at the top of the eighty. The implications were plain from their conversations:

"Shall we tell all the boys what a prize we picked up?" Bandyworth was asking.

"Just the ten White Sharks," Sully said. "We're the ones he shot. He's our dish."

"Beware of telling the Green Coats," someone said. "They might take a fool notion to change their colors."

"Haw! Likely!" This bit of mockery was not unexpected; nevertheless it implied hatreds that stung Allan. Until that deadly march up the trail, he had believed that every man of them would have stuck by him like sons to a father.

Allan caught other comments which implied that the third and lowest class among these men were the Rocky Chests. Among these was that sleepy guard Gallagher.

AND SO Allan, bouncing along in a blanket with eyes almost closed and ears open, got his first line-up of the world he had entered. These

men had struck their own pattern of life. They still recognized the tragedy that had brought them here. It showed in the insolent supremacy of the White Sharks. Those who had attempted to desert, in their last official hour under Burgess, and had been shot down, were the top men here. From them he could expect anything; for they had him. They could feed fat a long remembered grudge.

This Allan could understand. But when they spoke of the mystical evil, he slipped into the great gray fog of the unknown.

"Wait till the Scravvzek gets a chance at him!"

"S-s-s-sh! He's beginning to stir."

"We'll dump him in a cell and let him—"

"Don't start that again! Sully, I've got an idea. Why not put him under a good orange light and watch him twist?"

"No time for that now."

"You wouldn't be jealous, would you, if he turned out, done to a crisp?"

Sully growled that he had thrashed men for less than that. These remarks only mystified. Allan tucked them away in his aching brain for future reference.

Sully ended by swearing these three White Sharks to secrecy for the present. He appointed one of them to stand guard over Allan. The others must hurry on and get ready for the afternoon's event.

Then Allan found himself behind bars within three walls of stone. The man outside the bars was Bandyworth. Their parting advice was for Bandy to be on his wits in case his prisoner woke up.

"Don't forget," Sully added, "that he's our dear captain who believes it's

better to give than receive. Especially bullets."

Bandy gave a piggish grunt. It was plain he didn't need the reminder.

Through the narrowed eyelids Allan looked past the metal bars. Below this curved balcony, he could see a vast pretzel shaped chamber. It was walled in like the inside of a giant bowl, or rather, three or four bowls interlocked. A baseball game might have been played within its limits. Various transparent partitions curved through the center to form an inner structure. Rows of shining plastic seats gleamed under the soft yellow light of a bowl-shaped ceiling.

The Glass Arena! Allan would get in on the show after all!

He restrained his excitement. He wasn't supposed to be awake. Bandy had thus far failed to get any words out of him. A certain inspiration he had caught about the orange light was worth trying.

WHEN BANDY dashed a cup of water in his face, through the bars, there was nothing for Allan to do but shake out of it. He sat bolt upright on the stone floor and smeared his wet cheeks. However, he refused to look at Bandy. He allowed his eyes to wobble dizzily. He pretended to be seeing nothing.

"What's the matter, ex-captain? Speak up."

"Spots!" Allan said groggily. "Too many spots." He clutched at the air as Jimmy had done. Then he added, very pointedly, "Too much orange light."

"Orange?" Bandy leaned against the bars to study him. "Orange?"

"Where am I?"

"Did you say orange light? I don't know where you got it, but you sure

got a bad case of it. You must have fell right in the glow and laid there for a long time. Orange, Humm?. Well, that should take effect right away."

Allan might have said, "How?"—and spoiled everything. He meant to find out. There was some weird significance to orange light. He couldn't be sure he was acting as one should act, but he'd soon find out, if Bandyworth fell for his gag of blindness.

Bandy said, "By dibbles, if you got too much orange, you may cause Sully more trouble than he's bargained for. I suppose you're already in the mood for a little 'missionary work'."

Missionary work? Bandy couldn't mean that literally. Allan took a chance. "You know what kind of missionary work I'm in the mood for."

"Yeah. Probably a little guillotin-in' would suit your taste just fine. Would you like to see them poison the tribe?"

Allan tightened his teeth to keep from saying the wrong thing. He took a chance. He uttered it with strong conviction. "I'd like to poison them myself."

"Say, you're coming on fine! That orange light really got you. You'll be popular around here, the first thing you know, in spite of bein' a one-time captain. Maybe I can fix it so you can help out on that poison job. Are your eyes still actin' up?"

"Spots," said Alan, clawing the air. "You boys go ahead an' poison 'em. I'll listen to 'em scream."

"Well, by-diggety. I never knew the light to take hold so fast. Maybe you was under it for two or three days, unconscious. You were acting plenty blotto when we came on you, hookin' your arm through to the glide-walk."

Glide-walk? Allan thought of Jim-

my coasting away. His White Shark guardian continued:

"Can you see the arena down there? This way. Down over the balcony, in that big yellow room. See?"

"I can't even see you." Allan said. "Maybe if I'd try holding a coin over my eyes it would help."

HE REACHED for his pocket-book, opened it, removed two nickels, and managed to spill two half dollars on the stone floor. "Oh-oh. I dropped one."

Awkwardly he got down on his hands and knees and began to grope. Bandy pretended to be helpful, directing him. But there was no mention of a second half dollar. He heard Bandy quietly turn the key and tiptoe in. One half dollar had rolled to the far corner, and Bandy went straight for it. He moved stealthily. He bent down, picked up the coin, and pocketed it. He started back, believing Allan had seen nothing.

Before he reached the open cell door, Allan pounced. He cupped his hand over Bandy's mouth.

Bandy reared up and tried to throw him off. He hung tighter than a mustard plaster. Bandy dropped to his knees quickly. Allan whirled him to one side and kept the grip on his face. Bandy bit him. The teeth froze into the palm of his hand. He tore away, then closed in with a right flat. Bandy whirled into it and got it square on the chin. He gave a grunt like a hog beside a bolt of lightning. His arms dropped as if the day's work was suddenly over. And it was, for Bandy.

Allan bound him with Bandy's own clothing, and gagged him so tight he couldn't even think of gulping.

"You'd be uncomfortable in this cell, Bandy," he suggested, along

with his hard breathing. "It's too light. I'll find a darker corner for you."

He loaded Bandy over his shoulder. His shoes made an awful noise, clattering on the stone floors, but he took a chance. Scouting along the way toward the dark shadows of the honey-comb farther along the balcony, he deposited Bandyworth on a stone shelf for safe keeping.

"This will teach you, Bandy," he said in an undertone, "not to reach too fast for other people's half dollars. Which reminds me—"

He removed the coin from Bandy's pocket.

"I might need this. I'm on my way to the show at the Glass Arena. If there's a Mickey Mouse, I'll come back and get you."

CHAPTER XVII

ALLAN SKIPPED along through the shadows provided by the candle-drip formations of rock. He was free again. He must find Jimmy.

But the sight of the yellow-lighted arena stopped him. People were coming in. Dark people. Tribesmen—a whole town of them. The population of Bonjojop!

Allan watched, resting an arm against a pillar of rock. He was conscious of the throbbing headache, echoing his recent encounter with the White Sharks. He'd been lucky, breaking out of their grip, and shaking off Bandy.

The half dollars clinked in his hand. They were of no consequence, he thought. He took an inventory of his pocket things. Here was the cigaret lighter he had misplaced, together with a silver dollar, wrapped in a handkerchief. That silver dollar weighed like a bucket of gold.

The chief! He must find the chief! Chief Koo-Jop! The old boy was probably tearing his whiskers because his errand boy Buni didn't come back. That silver dollar carried an obligation made in good faith.

What of Jimmy? Should he try to find Jimmy first, or should he—

His decision came quicker than the question. He dared not gamble that Jimmy's luck would be as favorable as his own. However, all roads appeared to lead to the Glass Arena at this busy hour. Maybe Jimmy would find his way here too.

Some of the eighty were filtering in. They gravitated to the rear of the arena where a corner had been blocked off with a high wall of glass.

Meanwhile, the tribesmen were trailing into view by the hundreds, distributing themselves among the semicircular rows of seats. A White Shark urged them along. They plodded in, single file, and Allan watched the thin blue shadows that sifted across the yellowish stone floor. Their hesitations and stumblings were less from fatigue than from uncertainty, he thought. They were confused and troubled. The gods had deceived them.

"Koo-Jop!"

Allan spoke the name to himself with mingled excitement and respect. It was the chief himself, marching in at the end of the procession. Two White Sharks guarded him.

What striking dignity, Allan thought. Koo-Jop's head was high, and he stood straight, in spite of his enormous girth. He was clothed in gold and silver brocaded garments that exaggerated his size. Black-skinned, regal, barrel-shaped and barrel-voiced—that was the way Allan had remembered him. Down through the years he had stood solid and unshaken in his tribal leadership. Only

deeply rooted religious superstitions harmed his good judgment.

What humiliations and perhaps terrors was he going through now? Allan wondered. His solemn dark face was a mask of composure.

This was Koo-Jop. He needed an American dollar. He needed it if only as a symbol of encouragement. He should have some assurance that Buni's errand wasn't wasted.

Koo-Jop must be contacted.

How?

Allan couldn't risk exposing himself again. He wasn't up to fighting eighty men. Any thought of reestablishing himself as their captain was out of the question. One break and he'd go right back in the clink.

THINGS WERE pretty hushy down there under the yellow light. The several hundred natives were jabbering in excited undertones, wondering what was meant by all this weird grandeur of sitting in an auditorium. To the rear of the native crowd, several of Allan's eighty men were gathering. The White Sharks were motioning the others to come into conference. The glass room was like a press-box at the back of a stadium. The White Sharks were calling the rest of the eighty into this glass room.

One-way glass. Allan moved along the shadowy balcony trail close enough to make this discovery. He couldn't see through the glazed wall into the "press-box", but when he got a view through the open doorway to glimpse the glazed wall from the inside, it was no longer glazed, but admitted a clear view of the crowd and the arena beyond.

He was dangerously close—a matter of seventy or eighty feet. The nearness whetted his curiosity. Business was being discussed in that

press-room. If he could only catch a quick earful, he would have the key to this whole mysterious Arena affair.

Did the tribesmen know what the score was? Or were they here as guinea pigs? What would happen if one of these natives would slip back toward the press-box conference and eavesdrop? He wouldn't get far, Allan decided. They'd see him through the glass before he knew it. They'd probably box his ears and send him back to his seat.

Suddenly Allan saw the way. He whirled and sprinted back over the dark balcony trail. His toes barely touched the ground. He dodged the projecting stones, hurdled the mounds of candle-drip stalagmites, and bounded down into a small ravine. Here a tiny stream glided down over the purple rocks. He had remembered it. Now he needed it.

He undressed hurriedly. His scheme called for precious minutes of preparation. Time was at his heels.

The stream had deposited a dark, greasy sediment over the purple rock, and that was what he wanted. He smeared his hand over it and began to paint his body.

Rapidly he treated himself to a coating of dark coloring over most of his body.

Then he used his trunks and strips from the tail of his shirt to fit himself out with scanty clothing that might pass for the simplest sort of native costume. With the aid of his good leather belt and a handkerchief packet, he managed to carry his pocket things.

He had discarded his shoes. His tender feet might just as well toughen up. He was going native.

With the aid of a small mirror, he gave the final touches of blackening to his face and neck. He kneaded mud

into his hair and scuffed it into a kinky mat.

Finally he rolled his surplus clothes into a ball and hid them in a niche above the S-shaped bend in the stream. He caught a glimpse of his reflection in the water, and might have chuckled at the wild looking native who returned his stare. But he couldn't take time to chuckle.

It was the geography of the mountain caverns that accounted for an unexpected improvement in his native appearance only a minute and a half later. He had decided to take a different route back. The balcony trail appeared to go on around. He would follow it and approach the Glass Arena from the other side.

This route took him past a doorway of another cell, very much like the one he had recently occupied.

He stopped, gazed, and moved closer on tip-toes. The cell was occupied. Its occupant was lying on a blanket, asleep. The dim light outlined the strong, sensitive features of his dark face.

"One of the pojaks!" Allan said through his hard breathing. What was *he* doing here? Allan noted that one of his hands gripped a stone, about the size of a hand grenade. Pojaks always carried a stone, or a clod, or a plant—religious symbol of keeping a grip on the earth. The other sure sign that this man was a highly esteemed religious leader was the head dress of busy black feathers ornamented with yellow bull's horns.

THIS POJAK, whether drugged, or ill, or just plain sleepy, had made himself more comfortable by removing his horns and feathers. Along with the pojak headdress was a Bunjojop holiday suit of black and red feathers and a bone-ornamented chest plate. The costume lay in a

heap in the corner near the cell door.

Allan got down on hands and knees, reached in, and caught an edge of the costume in the tips of his fingers. A soft swish of feathers over stone, and the prize was his. The handsome pojak slept on.

Less than another minute was lost in donning the costume. Decked out in black and red feathers that fluffed out like fountains from his shoulders and hips, Allan gave one quick whirl to test the swish and clatter. The bones of the ornamented breastplate made him feel like a walking skeleton.

This much of the costume would clinch the illusion that he was a native. But would he be too conspicuous? He turned the fancy horned headdress over in his hands, wondering. No, he mustn't wear *that*. It was strictly pojak. It would attract attention, and he would give himself away. Suddenly he was in doubt whether he should have donned any of the costume. He meant to slip into the crowd inconspicuously, deliver the dollar to Koo-jop, and slt innocently. The chief would know instantly that he was an impostor, but would realize that he must be a friend. That would pave the way for confidences and a renewal of acquaintance. But the costume—

He started to put the headdress back through the bars when he noticed that the pojak's eyes were open. Black, handsome eyes, glaring at him.

"Here," Allan said, holding the headdress toward the bars. "Here—"

The pojak sprang to his feet and marched up with a ferocity that might have been madness. Allan backed away. If the fellow would have understood English Allan might have reasoned with him. No use to stand within reach of a maniac. The

bars were there. Allan was on the right side of them.

"All right. I've got it. I'm borrowing it, see? I'll bring it back. You just wait. Don't go away."

And with that Allan spun away and started to sprint off; feathers flying and bones rattling.

He remembered the stone in the pojak's hand only when he heard it whizzing through the air. He ducked and it caught him just above the ear. He stumbled.

He fell, stunned, and the horns clattered on the stone.

Dazedly he picked himself up and discovered he was holding a weird handful of black feathers and yellow horns. He couldn't think what it was. Or where he had come from. Or where he was going. His head was splitting with pain.

He heard voices approaching. Two men were coming toward him, marching briskly in starch white uniforms. He had the vague feeling that he should hide. But he couldn't get his wits together in time.

Within a few feet of him the two White Sharks stopped.

"Look, would you!" one of the starchy fellows shouted.

"Well, by jupiter, here's one of them! He's come to meet us! Now how did he get out?"

"Bandy or someone must have come over to get him."

"Not Bandy. He's at the other end, helping Sully."

"Well, someone's let this fellow out and started him down the trail."

The name of Sully brought Allan back to a sharp sense of danger. He barely had the presence of mind to mumble a few old Bonjojop words. He had become a native. He needed to play the part.

And so he yielded to the entreaties of the two white men in white uni-

forms. They were leading him toward the Glass Arena. They were telling him to come on, like a good boy. It was time for him to take part in the show.

CHAPTER XVIII

LIEUTENANT Sully was in good form. He paced back and forth in front of his assemblage in the press box. He had looked forward to this hour for a long time. The whole scheme of using "Scravvrek poison" on the Bonjojop tribe as a demonstration was his own pet project.

This was Sully's big deal. He had organized most of the eighty to help him put it over. He marched out into the larger auditorium with the air of a dictator.

He stopped abruptly. The tribe began to hoot. Not at him, but at the show. They pointed excitedly at the two pojaks. Instantly they knew that one of the two gladiators was not their pojak. He was a fake.

Sully didn't understand their talk. His White Sharks wondered vaguely whether something was wrong. But Sully roared down the murmurs of the tribe. He didn't topple. Everything looked right to him. He bel-lowed for attention.

He made a quick savage speech. He advised the natives to prepare for the worst. They were to see the naked truth. Their two pojaks, who were supposed to be friendly, were about to fly at each other's throats.

"Watch them, they think they're alone. Watch them!"

Sully might have saved his breath. The Bunjojops saw it differently.

One of their pojaks was in danger of attack. An outsider—an impostor dressed like a pojak—was ready to deal death. A few of them grew panicky and rushed forward and began

to beat on the glass wall. They tried to attract the pojak's attention. But it didn't work. The one-way glass foiled them.

"Order! Order!" Sully thundered, marching down the aisle. But already the situation was getting out of hand. The White Sharks began to use their clubs on the frenzied natives, and a riot ensued. Already a score of natives were heating on the glass with flats and stones.

Inside, nothing of this pandemonium could be seen.

What Allan saw as he came onto the stage was an almost empty space, walled in by glass. Opaque glass walls. It would be easy to forget that there was an audience just beyond, watching his every move.

There was something in the ceiling of the stage that he couldn't stop to notice at the moment. Already the "other" pojak had entered at the opposite door.

The wild look in the pojak's eye told Allan to beware. The fellow crouched and showed his teeth. He was scared and desperate, and he must have known instantly that this trumped-up fight meant his life or Allan's. An attendant entered, forced a weapon into Allan's hands and a similar weapon into the trembling fingers of the pojak. Then the attendant made a quick exit.

The weapons resembled corn knives—eighteen inch blades with wide, squared off ends and no curve, and a hard crudely carved handle.

Allan didn't intend to fight. Certainly he had no reason to do so. But the pojak couldn't know that. If Allan spoke he must speak in the pojak language.

"Noodool!" Allan called. "Noodool!"

His brain whirled as he tried to search for more adequate Bunjojop words. He approached slowly and

held his arms wide in a gesture of friendliness.

"Noodool! Noodool!" he repeated.

THE ADVERSARY looked at Allan curiously, wondering what the game was. His eyes flashed. He spit on the blade of his knife, he weighed it speculatively in his hand and took a step forward. He was gauging Allan's treachery evidently, and sizing up Allan's probable strength and skill.

"Hanwool-Ko-Jop!" Allan said quietly.

The pojak relaxed a little. The power of words. The idea was getting over that Allan was a friend of Koo-Jop, the chief.

Suddenly they were both distracted by the sounds of rapping on the glass wall. So the audience wanted to get in on this, Allan thought. They were out there, unknown to this desperate pojak, and they meant to save him from death at Allan's hands. What if they broke in and swarmed over the stage? Allan's life wouldn't be worth an American silver dollar.

The charm! Allan took a chance. He tossed his knife to the floor, repeated his gesture of friendship, and brought forth the silver dollar.

"Friend of Koo-Jop," he repeated in Bunjojop, holding up the coin. "Koo-Jop there. Koo-jop fojo-wee!"

He pointed to the glass wall that was sounding with violent thumps. Could he succeed in telling this poor frightened African that the whole tribe was out there?

He tossed the coin to the pojak. "Give it to Koo-Jop," he said tensely in his hest tribal tongue.

The pojak caught the coin out of the air, looked at it and flashed a quick smile at Allan. He had seen it before, of course. He understood. He tossed his weapon to the floor.

into Doc Pakkerman, I might get the dope from him as easy as anyone. He had a blunt way about him. His brain had taken a jolt somewhere along the line. But he had flashes of being smarter than any of us. Do you remember Doc?"

"Do I remember Doc!" Jimmy waxed enthusiastic, and Allan had to hush him. Doc Pakkerman had once been Jimmy's Maple City hero, and he whispered to Allan the story of how he had been wishing he could carry on for Doc the night he had humped into the mayor and the Yippee Girl. "Gosh, if we can git Doc on our side, he'll give us a key to the city."

"This way," Allan said, leading on into the darkness. He was determined that there must be a way to the avenue of voices. The dimly reflected light showed ridges of dark green floor stones back down the trail, and he heard Jimmy muttering to himself that that was the way back to the Old Man's Hand.

"Stay with me and we won't get lost," Allan said with exaggerated confidence. "Here, this leads up."

"I've found a path over here, Captain."

"This way, Jimmy." Then Allan stopped. "Burn steer. Dead end. S-sh! More voices coming. I'll go back where I was. . . Coming, Jimmy?"

"Huh? What'd you say? Where are you?"

Jimmy's call sounded faint, as if through a partition of thin stone. Allan couldn't respond at once, for there were other voices moving close, as before, but approaching voice. Voices out of the black recesses somewhere overhead. They were passing. They gradually faded into meaningless echoes.

"Do we dare light a light, Cap?"

That was Jimmy's voice again!

"Where are you?" Allan had an uncomfortable hunch that Jimmy was somewhere above him. The voice was close, yet Jimmy had certainly gone the other way. Allan reached for his cigaret lighter. Instead, he found a forgotten packet of matches. "Where are you?"

"Cap, I've got a feeling this floor is moving. Where are you?"

"Right where I was. *Jimmy! Where are you going? You're fading! Are you up there in the shadows?*"

"Don't walk out on me Captain. I'm sittin' right here. . . Or am I movin'?" Jimmy's voice trailed off. Allan barely caught the last faint call. "Hellooo-o-o-o-o-o!"

Then Jimmy was gone.

Allan had lost three matches trying to strike a light. Now he succeeded. He caught a glimpse of the green and black walls of stone close around him. Some four or five feet above his head was a niche in the perpendicular wall large enough that a child might have crawled through. Allan clambered upward. His light went out. He struck another, regained his footing, then caught a hand over the edge of the opening so that he could chin himself, then booked his elbows on another edge. Thus suspended for a moment, he ceased to breath long enough to listen.

"Whissssh!"

IT WAS a sound so faint that he compared it to a kitten's breathing. A continuous, smooth, gliding sound. He thought of liquid flowing. Of sand sifting. Of a serpent crawling. That faint "whisssh" of some sort just beyond the range of his vision. The match flickered out. Hanging on with one arm, he managed to light a third match. He

They dodged stalagmites, and skipped through streams of yellow lights in search of the deeper shadows.

"How did you know it was me?" Allan yelled.

"Your big feet," Jimmy said.

"You don't say!" They were bounding up over an embankment toward the level of the balcony. "You knew by the dollar."

"Besides," Jimmy yelled, "I saw you get into your disguise. I been watchin' over you like a good angel. Just like Yippee told me to. But you sure got yourself in a devil of a mess this—look out!—wrong way!"

Three Green Coats rushed in from three directions. Jimmy collided with one, and they did a double cartwheel down the embankment. Allan tackled the second and threw him over his head. The third did a neat sidestep. He pitched a rock at Allan. Only a swift ducking saved him from being conked. He leaped at the fellow, gave a wild yell like a Bonjojob, and chased him off.

There were too many fights in too many directions by this time for them to make a clean getaway. Sure-footed Jimmy was right with him, however, leaping rocks like an overgrown chipmunk.

Whenever they edged past a scrap that couldn't be dodged, they fell to fighting each other until they got out of range. It wouldn't have looked right for a White Shark and a pojak to be running away together. But now that the battle was raging, their identities were lost.

They faked a battle while a chase went past them. Allan caught his breath long enough to ask, "Where'd you get that fancy white uniform, Jimmy? What gave you the inspiration to turn White Shark?"

"Don't you remember laying Bandyworth on the shelf?"

"Bandy! I forgot about him."

"His nice, slick uniform was goin' to waste. So I worked him over. Gosh, it feels wonderful to be an aristocrat."

"Be a king if you want to, but look out that these Bunjojops don't crown you."

The battle gradually spread through the valley beyond the Glass Arena. Women and children screamed shrilly as they ran for safety. Back of them, Koo-jop and the warriors fought a stubborn fight. It was a costly ordeal. Rocks flew. Knives clanged. Heads fell. The caverns echoed the groans of death.

Shouts, cursing, tribal catcalls, sounds of bouncing rocks all mingled in the uproar.

Whenever the Green Coats carried a dead Bunjojop back to the Glass Arena, they were greeted by a triumphant shout from the rest of Sully's band.

The battle continued for three hours or more. Allan had almost lost track of time. He guessed that at least two days had passed since his entrance into this weird world. Had the fortune teller known she was sending him here in time to witness this clash?

Several forms were lying on the ground in the wake of the retreating tribe. Allan counted fifteen. Meanwhile, the Green Coats and Rocky Chests edged forward, little by little, trampling over the casualties.

THE ADVANTAGE of attack was all Sully's. He and the crew had been loaded for the purpose. With small carts of grenade-sized stones at hand, they had only to reach and throw. Whenever a native was struck

down, they could rush in with their White Shark clubs and settle his hash.

Allan and Jimmy dodged around and delivered several crucial punches that put a crimp in the White Sharks' progress. But the eighty men who had cheated death once before were a tough lot. They appeared to possess a strange resistance to flying stones.

Allan and Jimmy drew back from the fray, like interested spectators who saw that they had bet on the losers.

Allan felt that Jimmy was looking at him with an expression of disappointment.

"Darned if that crew ain't lost a lot of their good behavior. I always figured they was a pretty decent bunch of sailors when you was their captain," Jimmy commented. "What'd they do, Captain, if you was to walk up to 'em, Sully an' the others—not now, hut at some favorable time like after a hearty meal—an' calmly announce that you aim to be their captain again?"

Allan said lightly that he already knew the answer to that one. They'd knock him unconscious and put him behind the bars; for that was what had already happened. They were in no mood to put themselves under the thumb of a long-forgotten captain.

Nevertheless, the idea of declaring himself had begun to tantalize Allan more than he had admitted to Jimmy.

Jimmy stayed on the trail. "Look, Captain, if you put Bandy on the shelf, why not use the same prescription on the others?"

"There are seventy-nine others."

"There's two of us. And some of the others would join us quick, that's for sure. And the rest, heck we could pick 'em off one at a time."

"I'm way ahead of you, Jimmy, hut keep coming."

"Well, it could happen. Look, you've got Bandy. Then there's Gallagher—he'd be a pushover. That's two. An' like you say, there'd be some we could win over to our side right off. Like Pakkerman, maybe. I wish I'd had time to get him off in a corner."

"Pakkerman? Have you seen him?"

"I wasn't too sure about it. In all this dizzy light it's hard to tell who's who. Everybody comin' and goin' an' everyone wearing some sort of goofy uniform."

Allan was disappointed. He had kept his eyes peeled for Pakkerman. But there hadn't been much chance, during the riot and chase, to sift the crowd for familiar faces.

"We'll think it over," Allan said, not too optimistically. "We can't take for granted that the whole crew are vicious. It looks as though they've all degenerated, one way or another. But some of those Rocky Chests are too simple to be either good or bad, for my money... Pakkerman we should find. There's a chance he might unlock a whole chest full of mysteries for us. He was smart enough, if you could keep him in the groove."

Skirting along the darker pathways with Jimmy, Allan watched the last of the retreating tribe. They were taking refuge in a mountain shelf where the cavern ceiling came down low, and deep green lights shone from the rocks.

Koo-Jop had suffered a bad defeat, hut he was making the best of it. He had herded his people into the tortuous ravines where they could defend themselves. The White Sharks and their subordinates gave up the chase and turned back toward the Glass Arena.

CHAPTER XX

THE BATTLE was over.

The Bunjojops hastily built a harricade of stones across the entrances to their chosen shelf. Allan saw that the shelf led into another room beyond, from which the dark green light emerged.

"Temporarily they're safe," Allan said. "At least they can get their hreath and ask their trihal gods what to do next."

Jimmy gave him a questioning look. "Ya reckon? If I was a trihal god I would tell 'em to get the heck out of this mountain the quickest way."

Allan gave an amused laugh. "You're no trihal god."

"I said *if*."

"You're a White Shark. But I predict you won't stay that way long. As soon as the White Sharks find Bandyworth, we're both on the spot."

"Gosh, the dickens, he *will* be mad, won't he!" Jimmy looked around anxiously. "Wanna know something?"

"What?"

"Bandy is already runnin' loose. I saw him on the chase about five minutes ago."

"Steady, Jimmy. Someone should tell us these things. You saw him?"

"It looked like him. I couldn't be sure it was him because he didn't have his uniform on. An' we was too far away to see his tattoos plain."

"No uniform? What did he have on?"

"Not much. Just like I left him. I reckon it was Bandy, all right."

Allan snorted. "You reckon!" Well, that could complicate matters in a hurry. It was time to get moving. As soon as the White Sharks got together and compared notes, the news would spread to everyone to be on the lookout.

Allan wondered. Would the Sully

gang have enough control over all the others to send everyone out on a man hunt—Rocky Chests as well as Green Coats? Probably so. They had all pitched in and helped batter down the tribe at the risk of getting their own heads broke.

"Don't look so gloomy, Captain. That's jist what we want, ain't it? If they come out in bands of three or four, we'll either win 'em over or give 'em the works."

Allan nodded. "We'll either proselyte them or pulverize them."

Jimmy swallowed and said he guessed so, if it didn't take too much equipment.

"It's your lead again," Allan said. "You had an excursion down the line on that glide-walk that I missed. You never did tell me what you saw on that jaunt. But if there's any good ambushing, let's find it."

They hiked along almost silently. At their nearest approach to the Glass Arena, they could see that the whole crew had come in toward the "press box." The Rocky Chests were working with the Bunjojop casualties, putting the finishing touches to some of the victims, under Sully's supervision. The bodies were laid in a row. Then everyone—or so it seemed—gathered around the White Sharks for some sort of curtain lecture. Some new plan of action would be born in that conference, Allan guessed. He could see Sully strutting, gesturing.

THE ASSEMBLY was more than a hundred yards away—not so far but what Allan could single out several of the well remembered figures from his old crew.

"If they're all there," he whispered to Jimmy, "we should be able to spot Pakkerman from here."

"I'm lookin'," said Jimmy. They

paused to watch, and Allan began to count. But Jimmy added, "I don't figure he's there. If he was dressed the way I saw him up by the glide-walk, he'd show up plain."

"You saw him? What is this? Come on, give! What'd he look like? What was he doing?"

"All I can say is, I got a glimpse somewhere along the glide-walk of this tall husky fellow dodgin' around under this ball of fire. And it was the way he stepped that made me think it was Pakkerman."

"Ball of fire?"

"A great big blazin' ball of orange fire. The dangdest thing. You've got to see it."

"What do you mean, great big? Big as a grapefruit? Or a basketball? Or a dishpan?"

"Big as the biggest snowball you ever rolled down the hill. It hung over his head and shoulders like a shell."

"Did Pakkerman see you?"

"He was too husy to see anyone."

"Did you yell at him?"

"Captain, I haven't yelled at anyone down here. Except you. I'm too darned scared. My own echo would jump me right outa my shoes. Besides, Pakkerman was too husy to be yelled at. This ball of fire—uhmm, I wish I could describe it. Can you imagine what cotton candy would be like if it was made of little veins of fire instead of candy—and it was hoverin' over a man's head as big as a big barrel?"

"A head as big as a harrel? Or the cotton candy?"

"The candy. I mean the fire. A harrel-size ball of cotton fire. Orange colored—"

"My imagination fails me," Allan muttered, growing exasperated over Jimmy's fabulous descriptions. "I'd better see it for myself. The main

thing is, I'd like to see Doc Pakkerman. If we can catch him in a lueid moment, without too much cotton candy floating around his head, maybe we can get some answers."

They hurried on. Along the way, Allan questioned Jimmy for more details of his recent adventure on the glide-walk.

"That was the darnedest ride I ever rode," Jimmy confessed, giving an audible gulp. "I can't begin to tell you all I saw. Strangest feelings. Sights that maybe they were there and maybe they weren't. Didja ever go to an amusement park, Captain? Didja ever ride through the love tunnel?"

"I'll spare you the secrets of my private life," Allan said dryly. "What else did you see?"

But Jimmy's mental images were too hazy to mean much.

"Sure I had my eyes open," he would say, trying to defend himself. "But I've seen so darned many things—"

"Mostly spots, I guess," Allan suggested. "This orange fireball hovering over Pakkerman was probably just another spot."

"Then it was one devil of a spot. Remember, Captain, all this time I was lost. Lost and scared. And worryin' about you. Whenever I saw forms or heard voices, I was all for makin' myself scarce. The first time I spotted some Green Coats trudgin' along on solid ground I snuck after 'em. An' when I heard them say they were on their way back to the Glass Arena, I said to myself, that's for me. So I headed back the shortest way, trailin' 'em. But not wantin' to renew old acquaintances, I did the fast dodge act. Then somewhere along the line, I picked up your trail, and let my eyes feast on the happy

sight of you tyin' Bandyworth into knots. From there on—"

"S-s-sh!" Allan whispered, stopping short. "There's someone biding beyond that next rock."

THEY SCRAMBLED up the bank of dark rocks and thought for a moment that they had made a clean getaway. The yellow glow of the Glass Arena was back of them now. The deep blue and purple tunnels were only a few yards ahead, and the glide-walk would be somewhere beyond.

"Gosh-ding-it!" Jimmy spluttered, kicking at the loose earth. "Got my foot caught in something. Vine or something." -

Allan whirled to help him. Instantly he knew. "It's a rope. Shake it off! Off!"

Allan leaped and caught the line as Jimmy started tumbling down the bank. At the same instant a loop fell over Allan's shoulders. He was jerked off his feet. He fell to one elbow, still trying to hold the line that was hauling Jimmy away. Another rope whizzed through the air and caught his foot.

A dozen Green Coats and White Sharks bobbed up from four sides and bounced in upon them. The trap had sprung. They were caught. A triumphant shriek cut through the excited voices—a shriek that was Bandyworth piping his revenge.

"How 'bout it, Bandy?" someone demanded. "Are these your invaders? One of 'em is wearin' a White Shark uniform."

"Shake him out of it," Bandyworth yelled, stomping forward with a comical display of bruised arms and legs. "Don't damage the clothes. That's my uniform."

"Hey, I've seen this guy before!"

"Me too, I'd know that mug any-

where. What's he doin' here?"

"Invaders!" Bandyworth growled.

"Gimme my pants."

"But what's he doin' runnin' around with this big black pojak?"

"Pojak, hell!" Bandy retorted. "That's your old captain. Bring 'em in boys. Sully's gonna make 'em sing."

CHAPTER XXI

BUT JIMMY wasn't the only one who lost his clothes. The rugged treatment in store for Allan began with ripping his pojak costume off his body. The men jeered as they marched him and Jimmy back to the conference. Two choice prisoners—a fat one and a skinny one—a white one and, ostensibly, a black one

"It's the captain. He's got a deep sunburn, all except around his middle. Black on both ends and white in the middle. Look at him, boys, meet the captain! It ain't a Holstein bull, boys, it's the captain!"

Sully and the men roared with sinister mirth. They were intoxicated over their blood bath. Their Bunjojop victims lay around the edge of a white tile plaza a little distance from the Glass Arena. Two live captives from the outside world were all that the gang needed to make their victory hilarious.

Sully swaggered toward the thick row of stalagmites beyond the plaza of white tile, and motioned the marchers to follow him. Guards blew whistles and hooted. The Rocky Chests and Green Coats—every man who was not preoccupied with some urgent responsibility—crossed the white tile floor and joined the jeering throngs.

Allan found a chance to spill a few words to Jimmy. "They'll take me for a ride, Jimmy. There's no way

out of it. It's their chance to lord it over their captain. But you can break out of it. Watch for a chance when I start talking up to them."

"I'll watch," Jimmy promised. "But I think they're gonna make hash outa both of us."

The jibes were for the captain. Already Jimmy was all but forgotten. Bandyworth was the only one still concerned with getting revenge on him. But Bandyworth had emerged as a power second only to Sully himself, as a result of his successful capture.

Outside the stretch of white tile floor, the uneven ground among the stalagmites provided a natural pit about eight feet deep shaped like the inside of a cup. The guards pushed Allan and Jimmy into this. They scrambled to regain their footing as they tumbled down its irregular sides.

"Take it easy, Captain!" "On your toes, there, Captain. Inspection!" "Swab the deck, Captain. Lively, lively, lively there, or we'll throw you overboard."

Allan straightened and looked his men over. Only his manner was dignified. His appearance, he knew, was a sorry spectacle. He was painted black, his hair was matted with mud, he was naked. And these jeering men—his crew—were crowding the edge of the pit, making the most of his ugly plight. Stormy weather ahead, he thought. At least, they had removed the ropes.

"Listen, Men!" He lifted a hand slowly. "Listen to me. You're in for trouble. I can help you."

For all his disadvantages, his voice and his manner won him a respect. A little more of this and he'd have a fighting chance to take command.

"I can help you. I came to help you. Listen to me!"

SILENCE. Was he winning their respect? Or was it only curiosity?

That was it. They only wanted ammunition for their mockery. Sully spoke and acted fast enough to check any quivering loyalties. He spit at Allan.

"That's what we want to hear, Captain! You came to *help* us! We just been waiting for you. Holding our breath, waiting for you to come get us out of trouble." Sully spit again "It's all right, boys. The captain's here now. Everything's safe."

White Sharks guffawed, and their subordinates joined in like a chorus.

"Maybe he's come to take care of our wounds," one of the White Sharks hooted. "Wanna see my scar where you shot me, Captain. Bring us any Scotch tape, Captain?"

Some punctuated his shout by kicking some rock dust into the pit. Allan stood and let the dust shower over him.

The show went on for several minutes. It was marred somewhat for Sully by the fact that Allan was still blacked up and didn't look like himself. To the stupid Rocky Chests he was just a painted man standing there; imaginations were slow to identify him. But Sully soon went to work on that. He had several of the Rocky Chests shower buckets of water over Allan to convince themselves.

If the action was intended as a torture, Allan welcomed it. The mud streamed out of his hair, and the slime rained off his body.

"There, boys, he *is* the captain. Surprising what a good bath will do for the captain. Now for a good rub down. Anybody got any hot tar?"

Allan took advantage of his moment of naked dignity to try again. "Men, listen to me. You—Danswell—you, Johnson—you know I've come

to help you. You—and you, Richardson, remember the last words I said to you? I've dreamed of those last minutes a thousand times. I've come to help you get back—"

Plop! A gob of mud struck Allan in the face. He edged to one side of the pit, clearing the mess from his eyes and nostrils. He hoped Jimmy might have been able to take advantage of this moment for a leap into the open. But it was too much to hope. The crowd was all around the pit. The ordeal would run its course.

They hurled gravel. They dashed water then kicked rock dust again. And with each attack, Bandyworth saw to it that Jimmy got his share as well.

After the second bath, there followed a hail of stones. Small ones first. "Had a massage lately, Captain?" "Make him dance, boys!" "Here's a free tattoo for the old boy." "Make him dance! Make him dance!"

Allan didn't dance. He stood and took what came. He saw that Jimmy was taking it, too, gritting his teeth and snapping his eyes defiantly.

"This is a sample of the hallstorms we have down in our private world," Sully said. "Strange thing, the hail keeps getting bigger. Look out, here come the hen eggs!"

THE ROCKY Chests were kept busy gathering up stones. But the Green Coats were entitled to their share of the sport. Soon everyone was in on it, tossing scores of stones into the air, so that they fell like rain.

There was a limit to human endurance. Allan couldn't avoid being beaten down time and again by the deluge. Up again, he dodged about to avoid the worst of it. For three or four minutes the game went on, and now the stones were clunking

down with enough weight to split a man's skull.

"Keep out from under them," Allan barked at Jimmy, as the two of them crossed paths in the center of the pit. On the next jump, Allan added, "Watch for a break. Take it—"

Allan had gripped a baseball-sized stone in each hand and suddenly he let fly with them. One at Sully. One at Bandyworth. Bandy went down with a yowl.

Sully dodged. The stone missed him, but the defiant act struck hard.

"Leave him to me!" Sully thundered. "I'll bust his skull wide open. Stop it! Leave him to me!"

The stone game came to a stop as Sully marched to the edge of the pit. Allan thought, Here it comes. The long-smouldering hatreds within Sully would have full play. Why didn't Jimmy make a run for it?

Allan made the break, then. He bounded up over the edge, just as Sully lifted something as heavy as an anvil. Allan sidestepped. A dozen men must have blocked his path. They crowded him toward Sully, and the anvil stone was raised to strike.

"Push him back into the pit!" Sully ordered.

The arms gave a heavy thrust and Allan took the fall, rolling, anticipating the crush of death before he could regain his feet.

He came up to his full height, Jimmy was in front of him, waiting to catch the blow.

But Sully stood like a statue, his arms upraised. He was listening to a sound from a distant tunnel. Everyone was listening.

A siren-like wail echoed dimly through the cavern. It was one of their guards signalling from a distance. Signalling something that made Sully forget all about the murder he meant to commit. He lowered the stone slowly. In his

tense, hoarse voice, he uttered words that struck chills through Allan's spine.

"The Scravvzek is coming! Take your places for the Scravvzek!"

CHAPTER XXII

THIS WAS an event. Sully had been looking forward to this for weeks.

Allan and Jimmy slumped quietly to the side of the pit, breathing hard. Allan wanted to close his eyes and faint away. He wished someone would dash another bucket of cold water over him. The stifling air of the pit was thick with the smells of dust and mud and perspiration. Poor Jimmy! He sank to his knees and allowed himself to flop over the heap of the rubble.

The White Sharks hastily bound them hand and foot, and hurried off to give their attention to more pressing matters.

Death had come close. A man had no chance in this world; no chance to fight, much less to speak.

Allan watched a pair of Green Coats help Bandyworth to his feet and lead him away. They were vowing vengeance for that injury.

But the rest of the crew were paying no attention to the casualties of past battles just now. *The Scravvzek was coming!*

Whooping signals rang back and forth through the neighboring tunnels. Sully was shouting orders. The crowd around the pit was on its toes.

"Stand by for orders," Sully yelled.

"Call the guards. I want everyone present or accounted for. Count those dead natives—and make sure they are all dead. I don't want any possums coming to life to spoil things. They'd tell the wrong story. Scour the Arena grounds again. Just once

around, fast. We don't want any natives busting in on our party..."

Amid the clatter of footsteps and that welter of voices, Allan and Jimmy exchanged words. They were stuck in the pit. Cautiously they moved closer together and began working at their ropes. Men were stationed close around, and Sully's orders had teeth of the sort provided by steel knives. But everyone's first thought now was the approaching Scravvzek.

"Relax," Allan whispered. "Our time will come. This Scravvzek thing seems to have them half paralyzed already."

Allan wondered what it would be like. A spirit? A monster? A creature of fire or lightning or mist? An animal—or a man—or something invisible? A deadly gas? A host of microbes?

"Do you reckon it'll eat us?" Jimmy whispered.

"How should I know?"

"He wanted those bodies counted. Maybe it feasts on people."

Allan tried to scoff at the idea. Still, there was a certain justification for it. The eighty men were showing the nervousness of a cage full of canaries expecting a visit from a cat.

"Whatever the damned business is," Allan muttered, "it doesn't come because it's hungry. It comes to see how much these boys have accomplished in the way of bad behavior. A spirit of evil—that's what it is. It glorifies killing and violence."

"How do you know?"

"I've listened to Sully's talk. He's been getting set for this event. His deal with the tribe was some sort of show-off experiment for the Scravvzek's benefit. Watch him. He's getting puffed up to make a report."

A few minutes later Sully was repeating his previous curtain lecture.

Most of the last minute preparations were complete, and the men had gathered around him for final orders.

Sully had managed to slick up his appearance and put on a fresh white tunic. He stood erect, hands on hips, as if he were the owner of this region, Allan thought. Or maybe he thought of himself as the captain of a ship. He had just committed an act of piracy and was ready to appear before the king. His blustering airs made Allan gag.

SULLY POINTED to the dark-skinned tribesmen lying around, and how he boasted over that achievement! His voice grated and growled and occasionally shrieked, until the very stalagmites seemed to grow nervous from the echoes. Allan wondered if any of his scores of listeners were bothering to sift the truth of his words.

"Remember my plan!" Sully called out. He pointed to the nearest corpses. "*They did it themselves. We didn't do it. We only stood by and watched them destroy themselves. Can you remember that, you rocky chested dopes? They murdered each other. That's our story. Who started it? The two pojaks. We only planted a little hatred and they did the rest. When they came together they battered each other to death.*"

One of the thick-skulled Rocky Chests didn't get it. He blurted that that wasn't the way he had seen it.

Sully snapped him off cold.

"Throttle him, someone. We stick to my story. Take my word for it, this Scravvzek is something to deal with. You don't know how. It's all *I* can do to handle him. Leave the talking to me. You men should all know by this time that most of us are here on probation. So far we

haven't made much of a showing. But our work today ought to look better. We ought to get credit—"

"Our work, huh? I thought we didn't do it," someone interrupted. "I thought you said—"

"Get this!" Sully roared. "*They murdered each other! We planted the hate for an experiment. They got into a jealous stew. Distrust, jealousy, suspicions, hatreds—that's our stock in trade from here on in. If we can convince the Scravvzek that we can dish it out scientifically all over the world, we're set. See what I mean? All the bonds that hold people together can be made to cave in—*"

Another Rocky Chest almost spoiled Sully's fine speech. He demanded to know how the hell anyone could say the Bunjojops murdered each other. "Listen, Sully, I almost slung my arm outa joint, throwin' rocks fer you, and here you don't give me no credit."

Someone struck the fellow across the mouth to quiet him. Sully applauded the action.

Allan thought they would all be too cowed to ask any more questions, for fear of being laughed at if not roundly dressed down. But a Green Coat spoke up with the question that Allan was asking himself.

"Can the Scravvzek be fooled that easy?"

It was obvious that Sully didn't know. He dodged neatly. He gave the questioner a condescending smile, then drew himself up into a puffy toad and began to bluff his way past the question. Another call from the nearby tunnel spared him. The guard warned, with a long singing "whoool!" that the Scravvzek was coming closer.

"It's time to scatter, men!" Sully ordered. "Take care! Look out for the ceilings. Get moving!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MEN looked to the walls and scattered themselves around among corners where no loose hanging stones would be likely to fall on them. Some crouched behind large stalagmites as if taking protection against tree trunks. Some ducked into alcoves in the cavern walls. A few remained on the cavern floor near the pit where Allan and Jimmy waited as prisoners.

A low sullen glow of light presently showed through the dark purple opening of one of the larger cavern passages.

Other lights seemed to dim down and lose their color. The brilliant yellow over the Arena faded. Purple walls deepened into blackness.

The approaching light grew brighter, a reflected glow of deep orange. As if an angry sun were about to rise through a black canyon.

As yet, its source couldn't be seen. Allan and Jimmy watched from the edge of the pit. One of the guards shot a hard glance at them and must have guessed that they were loosening their bonds. He started over toward them, swinging his sword. But at that moment the low roar of the Scraavvek's approach rumbled through the caverns. The guard shrank back, and decided to forget about Allan and Jimmy.

The rumble was followed by a clatter of stones falling here and there like scattered hailstones. Flakes of stone that the cavern weather had loosened from the walls and ceiling were beginning to shake down. Clack! Clack! CRASH!

The floor was vibrating strangely. The edge of the pit, against Allan's bound wrists, was quivering and shuddering. Leaning backward with

his elbows hooked over the edge, Allan looked at the row of murdered black men. Stone dead, and all too oblivious to this approaching pandemonium.

He noticed one who was lying face down, with one arm extended upward from the elbow, the hand hanging limply over his head. Now the trembling floor caused the hand to sway. "That dead man's started wavin'," Jimmy remarked. "Do you reckon he is dead?"

"I don't think he's bailing a cab."

"Well, I wish his hand would quit wobblin'. It makes me nervous. You got a funny feelin', Captain?"

"The ground's shaking my knees, if that's what you mean."

"Oh, is that how it is? Gozzle-ding-it, I kept thinkin' my knees was shakin' the ground."

A moment later the dead man stopped waving. A bucket-sized stone fell from the ceiling a few feet from him and his hand came down with a bounce.

"Look, Jimmy, the walls are moving!"

Allan forgot to breathe. It was the weirdest sight he had ever seen—stone walls stretching, widening, rising slowly like rubber balloons gradually expanding.

"Gosh, I wonder what's happening to the tribe back there in the green cave," Jimmy mumbled, trying to turn for a long backward glance. "I hope they don't git caught in a squeeze play." Suddenly he was frantic. "Gee-gee-gad! Look at 'em! Look at 'em! Those walls! Anything can happen, Captain. Anythin'—"

HIS OUTBURST was nearly violent, and Allan shuddered at the thought that he might lose his head completely. But his fury went to his hands, and his tough fight against the

bonds was suddenly won. A hand slipped free.

"Good for you, Jimmy! Take it easy now," Allan whispered. "No, don't untie me yet. Wait till you're sure no one's—"

Their words were swallowed up in the groaning of cavern walls and the thunderlike crashing of rocks. No one was looking now. Allan and Jimmy worked fast. In a moment they were free.

"Hold tight!" Allan said. "Wait till the time's right, and we'll pop out of this spot like a couple of rockets."

It came from all directions at once. It was fire and earthquake, and wind and the roar of avalanches, all sweeping in together. A single blaze of orange light came through the big purple cavern like a knife blade. Like an angry sun leaping into sight, it suddenly filled out into the shape of a ball. It was surging forward through the tunnel.

The uproar subsided momentarily. The blazing ball of light softened into a dull, melancholy sphere. That was what Allan and Jimmy saw as they bounded across the white tile plaza. The moment of semi-darkness was right for them. The quieting of sounds was less favorable. Their footsteps beat an audible tattoo.

But no one followed them. Just now everyone was looking out for himself, and the devil with the prisoners.

They stopped short when a new flare of orange light suddenly burst through a wall in the distance. *An eye of fire.* It broke through the solid rock. It gazed like the eye of a giant. One, two, three, four seconds—then it flashed off. Only the blank black wall was there where it had been. The bare rock, a wisp of steamy smoke, a wave of heat, and a spilling of lava. The thing had come from nowhere

and had vanished before Allan could catch his breath.

"Spots!" Jimmy gulped. "There it comes again!"

They ran back. They dodged behind a stalagmite that had just been deserted by two White sharks. They dropped down. Jimmy was gulping.

Another eye appeared, and another. They were bursts of flame. They spurted out of the wall without warning and left a spilling of melted lava in their wake. The wall then stared back blankly, and Allan tried to believe what he had seen was only an illusion.

It couldn't be denied. Neither could it be understood. Was there a fiery power underlying all of this mountainous region? A power that was everywhere at once? That moved through rocks as if they were nothing?

How could such a power ever exert any intelligent force over people? How could it be more than an uncontrolled volcano? *How?* Allan shook his head dizzily. They had called it evil. There's nothing evil about a tornado or an avalanche or an earthquake, he thought. No man in his right mind should ever bow down to blind force. Was there more? A living, breathing *spirit*, with a will directed by some *diabolical intelligence*?

One of the eyes had burst forth close enough for Allan to see plainly the veins of fire. The flame vanished, yet there lingered a thinner image—the ball of "cotton candy" that Jimmy had described.

It hung there against the wall, as large as any bass drum—fluffy and steamy, like a million tiny neon tubes woven into a pattern of glowing veins. It sifted along the rock, steam-like and gradually melted away. Lava streamed down the wall with a sullen swish and stiffened like candle drip.

Fire-eyes flashed. Walls groaned. Dust swirled. Ceilings stretched and grew to new heights. The mountains over this region must have been lifting their heads higher into the sky, Allan thought. And earthquakes must have rocked the valleys for miles around.

AND ALL THE while, the eighty men who had made this weird world their home were waiting, half hidden, like frozen rabbits—waiting for the Scravvzek to come to them—to weigh them in the balance. Before this blind power they were on probation, Sully had said. They were waiting to know whether they had grown strong enough in the arts of evil to win the Scravvzek's approval. What a strange ambition!

And all the while, the one deep orange sun was moving forward slowly through the largest passage that opened into the great room.

From one side Allan caught the motion of white. Sully. Sully in his starched uniform. He was walking forward, half defiant of the thundering powers that had threatened. His jaws were tight. His hateful eyes were narrowed against the flares of light. He walked with a tenseness, as if he expected the ceiling to break over his head.

Sully stopped. Along with the advancing orange fire-hall, a series of green lights had come into view. They reflected in his hard face. His eyes widened. He continued his advancing steps in an attitude of crouching.

Along with the approaching blaze of orange light, huge fingertips of green were advancing. Fingers of green light. Some of them were crawling along the floor of the cavern. Each blob of green was as large as a lion's paw, yet a thing of light. Thin, steam-like, luminous substance. Allan

thought he could see through them. He saw them in groups, like fingers of a hand. Groups of five or six or seven. He could visualize a huge shapeless invisible giant crawling—crawling blindly—feeling his way. But there were only fingertips to be seen. Three groups of them crawling ahead. Three invisible hands.

Back of the crawling ones, the shell of orange fire advanced with rhythmic motion like the stride of a man, walking slowly, confidently. Allan fancied he could see a man holding the shell of light over his head and shoulders.

Yes, there was a man... A pair of long legs, walking as a human being walks... Green rows of giant's fingers moving him along in the right direction.

LIKE THE fingertip of two giant hands about to touch, the two vertical rows of fiery green lions' paws urged the man forward. They had him. With a light touch they guided him. He made no attempt to twist out of their grasp. He didn't writhe from pain, or shrink from the heat of their colored fire.

"It's Pakkerman," Jimmy whispered. "I saw him before."

"Pakkerman!" Allan echoed without any breath at all. "Yes... Yes, of course... No one else in the world walks like that!"

"That's the Doc, all right," Jimmy whispered excitedly. "He's bringin' the fire right along with him. Or it's bringin' him, I can't tell which, for sure."

"It's got him! It's got him! Damn! How'd he get himself into that? How did he—"

Allan hardly knew what he was saying. The thing was moving along, coming closer, striding easily toward Sully, who stood waiting for it, arms

folded, face white with tension. Forty feet of white tile floor separated Sully from the advancing fingers...and Pakkerman.

"The poor guy!" Allan whispered. "He was always the unluckiest mortal that ever lived. But how did he ever get himself wrapped up in that?"

The clattering and groaning of rocky walls subsided into distant rumbles, like a storm that has decided to hold off its fury. A weirdly quiet moment. An ominous quiet. A quiet of waiting for something—an explosion—a bolt of lightning—a collision of worlds—

"Can you see his face?" Jimmy whispered.

"Faintly. He's in there, all right."

Pakkerman's costume was mostly nakedness. His muscular legs were coppery red from the glow of the fire he carried, cut by horizontal stripes of green from the great fingertips that lined his figure from ankles to chest. His shoulders and head could be discerned dimly through the shell of light. Deep-set eyes, a high forehead, waves of hair like carved ebony... But now the shell of orange fire that surrounded him like a ball of illuminated cotton candy grew brighter, and brighter, so that the smoky image of the man within was lost.

The halls of stone fell silent. The eyes from the surrounding walls had disappeared. The melting, hissing lava quieted. There was only the one ball of orange fire visible, now, burning into Allan's eyes like a baleful sun that had burned its way through a stormy sky.

The Scravvzek had come to a focus at last. It spoke.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT SPOKE in a low, rumbling voice—Pakkerman's voice! Pakker-

man's voice, *amplified*, as if rising out of a deep volcano.

The voice began with a humming and a mumbling—nothing articulate. Pakkerman's long arms gestured with the words. He seemed to be making a terrible effort. He couldn't seem to give his words the shape or form that the Scravvzek wanted. He was the Scravvzek's mouth piece, Allan thought... Now it was coming better. More like words. Pakkerman's enunciation...but the ideas must have been the Scravvzek's. Words of an evil power, forcing their way through the lips of a man!

What, Allan wondered, would this power be able to do to mankind if it did not have a human stooge—someone to work through and speak through?

Allan searched in vain for a parallel to such a power. He could think of none. He thought of the sun. The comparison was weak, but he couldn't get beyond it. The sun—a force that exerted what upon the earth? Was it only a blind, unthinking force? It played its miracles as if for man's benefit. Plant life, animal life, the forces of the sea and the winds and the seasons were the sun's mute power translated into terms of great meaning for mankind. Was it possible that *this* force, burning into man's mind and heart, worked its own miracles of some weird and evil nature? *Miracles of destruction and death?*

A wave of dizziness swept over Allan. He tried to tie together all the strange things that he had seen and felt and guessed since that fateful hour when Madam Lasanda had started him on this weird venture.

"Get this, Captain," Jimmy said, nudging him. "Don't dream off at a time like this or I'll think it's got you hypnotized. Are you all right?" "I'm watching," Allan said. "That

ball of fire looks like it's going to spill over. Is it just one ball? I seem to see three or four dancing through each other."

Jimmy was afraid Allan was missing it. "Do ya hear it talk? That's Pakkerman's voice, only a hundred times bigger and deeper. D'ya hear it?"

"Sure, I hear."

"There it comes again. That low, thunderish whisper. Hear it?"

Allan hadn't caught all the words. There was too much to catch all at once. He kept wanting the light to clear away so he could get a clearer view of Pakkerman's face, to see whether there was any expression of pain. To know whether Pakkerman's mind was bending readily to this strange phenomenon.

But all the inner view was lost in the overflowing light. Overflowing, indeed! A thin outer shell of light began to move away from the rest of it. Like a cloud, forming around the outside of itself and then drifting away.

Another. And another. The balls of thin-like substance were continually forming and drifting off, then melting away in the air. But all the while, the one single strong-burning globe of evil rested solid over the shoulders of its servant—Doc Pakkerman.

Sully was standing before it, trying hard not to seem to be backing away. The fire-globes were bubbling off at the rate of one every thirty or forty seconds. Like steam, they evaporated before they had floated many feet from their prolific sun. But their coming made Sully nervous. He motioned to certain other White Sharks.

Two of them marched out from their stations gingerly and stood near him. One of the fire clouds rolled down toward the floor. They urged Sully to move back a few steps. The

fire cloud rolled off in another direction and its lights waves were presently dissipated.

"...your report, Lieutenant Sully..."

It occurred to Allan that those rumbling words had been repeated two or three times. Sully was taking his time about rising to the occasion.

"...or which of you is the one who aspires to become a servant of the Scravvzek?"

SULLY responded instantly. He gestured his two companions to one side. Heedless of a fire cloud that rolled within a few feet, he stepped up and began to speak. Now his head was high, his eyes defiant.

His song-and-dance was pretty terrible, Allan thought. His voice scratched like rusty metal on a grindstone. His continual "*I did this* and "*I did that* caused the two White Sharks beside him to lift their eyebrows. He noticed, and presently he widened the pronoun into a generous "*We*." He went through an orgy of big boastful gestures toward the dead men who lay in disorderly rows across the floor. He waved at his subordinates, now emerging from their hiding places but keeping at a safe distance. It was his own cleverness that had accomplished this triumph of destruction. And these were the men who had cooperated in his plan.

"We planted the hatreds right in the natives' hearts. Like you told us to do, we injected the poison. We nourished it. We stood back and watched hosom friends turn into deadly enemies."

"Is that the way it happened?" came the Scravvzek's rumbling voice.

Sully was in danger of bursting his own chest, trying to put it over big.

It wasn't going over. Allan could tell that by the guttural edge to the

evil voice. He had never heard Pakkerman talk like that before. Savage snarling. Like a mad animal whose food is threatened. It was the Doc's voice, but hardened into something inhuman. As if his whole being were possessed by the Scravvzek.

Sully tried to go on. His planned speech had to go over or he was sunk.

"We gave the pojaks the stage. They flew at each other—"

"*What pojaks? Where are they now? Let them tell me.*"

"They flew at each other with knives. The tribe watched and took sides—"

"*Lies! Lies! Lies!*"

The Scravvzek's roar caused the floor to tremble under Allan's feet. From the big blurry ball of orange fire on Pakkerman's shoulders a flurry of flames shot out in all directions. The steamy balls of fire rolled outward and skimmed along the floor. Some of them were lost in the pit. Some dissolved as they passed over the bodies of the dead natives. Some moved dangerously toward Sully.

Sully didn't dodge or move backward. He stood his ground as if this were a test he must pass. One ball of fire engulfed him for a moment and seemed to whirl about him. Then it was gone, and he still stood, hard and defiant and more than ever a thing of evil, Allan thought.

THE SCRAVVZEK did most of the talking. Sully's words were lost in the roar. Allan saw that the walls were growing again, stretching and groaning and spilling their angry lava. Through the hissing and thunder and crackle of falling rocks, the savage conversation went on between the great power and the ambitious lieutenant.

Jimmy yelled at Allan against the static. "Hear what he's telling Sully?"

"Giving him the devil," Allan answered. "He had it coming."

And then Allan reflected upon his own strange comment. Curious, he thought, that he should take pleasure in seeing Sully get a proper dressing down from such an evil, monstrous power. Sully, for all his hideous actions, couldn't have been more than a speck of meanness in the eyes of the Scravvzek. His evil achievements were as nothing in comparison.

But the personal element had turned Allan's sympathies temporarily. He forgot that he had come to save every man of his crew who might still be saved. He hated Sully. He hadn't learned to hate the Evil Scravvzek—only to wonder at it.

Then, too, there was the fact that Pakkerman's flesh and blood were bound up with the fiery force. Pakkerman's personal qualities gave this personification of the Scravvzek a certain dignity that no evil power deserved. A distinctive enunciation. Personal strength as displayed by human muscles and a fine posture. And of course the demonstration of vast powers—spectacular, blood-curdling, yet controlled.

Jimmy nudged Allan and again they listened. The Scravvzek lambasted Sully—but not for his deceit! No? Allan's attention strained for every word. Not for his deceit but for his lack of ingenuity!

"*My servants must display a high order of talent!*" the Scravvzek roared. "*Where is your cleverness? What have you besides brute force? The beasts have as much! Can a dumb beast win the world by slaughtering all the people in it?*"

The quaking walls and ceiling quieted, however, before the Scravvzek finished. It ended its tirade with a surprising change of tone. It sud-

denly became at least halfway complimentary.

It complimented Sully's adeptness in lying. And his stubborn, dogged qualities of standing back of his lie. Not clever, nor adequate; but a commendable effort.

Allan groaned to himself at this turn of events. Even the lieutenant's blunt cruelties were given a little passing praise. The Scravvzek always had need of men of cruelty, no matter how crude their methods.

Sully made the mistake of getting too chesty over the compliments. The Scravvzek promptly squelched him, reminding him that persons who get the habit of resorting to simple brutality could never rise high in the hierarchy of evil.

Sully talked back defensively. "I still have the damned tribe in the palm of my hand. If it's skill you want—"

"If it's KILL, you have it. If it's SKILL, you don't. Not yet."

"I'll give you both," Sully shot back.

"You should have known that you missed your chance with the tribe because of Captain Burgess. He walked into your path. It was he—"

ALLAN'S blood froze. At the mention of his name, he saw Sully flash a glance toward the pit and then to some of the stalagmites in the shadows. Allan drew back into the deeper darkness. He wondered how many of the White Sharks may have been for him and Jimmy when they had a run for this position.

"...It was he who sabotaged your game with the pojaka. You should have known that, Sully!"

Allan saw Sully turn pale with rage. The green fingertips of light along Pakkerman's tall form seemed to reflect more than ever in the lieutenant's

face. This was the worse beating Sully had received, and anyone would know that he was grinding Allan between his teeth in that moment. A campaign of revenge would come out of that.

The Scravvzek gave him more. "*My eye above the mountains saw the captain enter. So far, he has not gone beyond this outer doorstep of my inner world, but soon—*"

Outer Doorstep! Allan caught the phrase. If this was only the outer doorstep, how much more world must lie within? The very thought was temptation itself. An invitation to know more of the world of evil.

"Don't listen," Jimmy whispered, suddenly terrorized to guess the thoughts that were racing through Allan's mind.

"S-s-sh!"

Now the Scravvzek must have been talking for his benefit, Allan thought. He trembled for fear some of the fiery spheres might come rolling over in his direction and give him away. There was no question but what the Scravvzek knew he was hiding here. The big rumbling voice went on:

"*I have followed his comings and goings. If you had crossed the Black River, Sully, and watched with me at the mirrors of the world, you might have observed the pattern of the captain's comings and goings. His feet have gathered no moss since he arrived. The Eye of the World could have told you much.*"

"All right, all right, I've got him here!" Sully retorted, his lips trembling with rage. He shot a glance at the pit. "He was here. He hasn't gone far."

"*The Eye of the World can tell you many things, Sully. But it lies beyond the Black River, and some very brave men have reason to fear the Black River.*"

"I'm not afraid of anything."

"Then, too, the *Eye of the World* is too complicated for the minds of some men. Do I make you understand through this voice that is speaking?"

"I understand," Sully said.

"I will come again when you and your men think you are ready for higher honors."

The vertical lines of fingertips began to force Pakkerman back a few steps. The fore fingers began crawling around the floor at random, splashing their green light on the white tile floor and the bases of two stalagmites at the end of the row of bodies. Again Allan caught the impression of long giants, claw-like, invisible except at the very end, and fast, strong and flexible.

"You reckon you'd get tangled up if you'd walk through those green lights?" Jimmy whispered.

Allan wondered. He could see through those fingertips as through mist. But at once the fingers displayed another proof that there was strength in them that no man had better challenge. Steamy and translucent though they were, some of them now enacted a miracle of their own. They piked up a section of the white tile floor and held it aloft like a giantie lid. The jagged patch of tile swayed gently in the air, ten feet above the rest of the floor.

The opening below the cake of white tile was glowing with pale blue fire. The flames licked upward. Obviously Sully had never seen it before. He staggered backward, his hands upraised defensively. The fingers were going to get him. They were going to drop him into a well of blue flames.

"Look!" Jimmy gulped. "Look! Those green fingers—"

Allan had jumped at conclusions the

same as Jimmy—the same as Sully. The green fingers crawled along the edge of the floor toward Sully, then beyond. They stopped at the line of dead bodies. The half visible grasp closed over a giant's handful of dead men, dragged them across the floor and dumped them into the well of flames.

Then the fingers returned for another grab. Sully, not quite paralyzed, was bounding back out of reach.

CHAPTER XXV

IT WAS Allan's and Jimmy's chance to do some bounding of their own, and they took it. Ahead and to the left—that second cavern would make way for them to get back to their clothing, and thence to their original landing place—Allan had had an eye on that route for minutes! Through a line of deep black shadow they ran.

They took one backward glance. The fingers were scooping up the last of the dead bodies. The orange fire around Pakkerman was retreating with the slow strong step that Allan remembered so well. The show was over.

"Are you coming?" Allan called to Jimmy as they cut over the ground.

Minutes later they were dressed again, much to their relief. Again they ran.

"My feet are draggin', Captain. Keep goin'. I'll catch you."

Allan passed through several curves of the passage before he slowed his pace. The darkness of the narrow tunnel seemed a kindly thing. Orange fireballs and fiery green fingers were at last lost in the distance. The air of the tunnel was cool and clean.

Allan waited for Jimmy to catch up. In his moment of waiting, he wondered about Sully. It would get him

down for a few hours, at least, and he'd probably order a general rest for the whole crew. But it would be only a matter of time until he'd start scouring these caves for the two that got away. Allan knew that he and Jimmy had better prepare themselves with some solid strategy. It stood to reason that Sully wouldn't let himself in for another humiliation of this sort from the evil Scavvzek.

"Coming, Jimmy?"

"Doggone-golly-darn-it!"

"What's the matter? We're in the clear, boy! Cheer up."

"I stubbed my toe."

"Oh, that's it."

"Stubbed it tryin' to keep up with you. I'm all fagged from doggin' that rock-throwin' game. I ain't danced so much since I got tangled up in a live wire." Jimmy took a few steps on one foot.

"We're fifty percent casualties, Jimmy. We'd better stop and set up a hospital."

"Laugh, gosh-ding it. It ain't your toe. It's my toe. My favorite toe on my right foot. Sure, laugh at me."

"All right, chum." Allan bent down. "Climb on and I'll take you piggy back."

"Wait, now. I'm not that bad off. I'm not complainin'. Just tellin' you, that's all. I'll bet you an' I ain't the first military power in history that's been crippled by a stubbed toe. Oh, my-gollies-zickety-hum-hum!"

Allan ushered Jimmy along, and that seemed to help. He knew exactly what Jimmy needed.

"What you require in this emergency is a nice nurse to smile at you real sweet. Now if we just had the Yippee Girl with us—umm, do you suppose she knows how to apply a bandage?"

Jimmy gulped and spluttered, and then rose to the occasion. "If she

does, it's a cinch you'd get a stubbed toe yourself."

"Not just one. Ten of them," Allan said. "This way to the Red Room. Sully and his gang have got a rest hour coming up, if I know my ex-lieutenant. And you and I are going to have some of the same."

CHAPTER XXVI

SUE CARSON and her little friend Bunni made their way up through the mountain paths above the lake of Bunjojop.

"Lead the way," Sue would say. The little fellow would hike along with a sense of importance.

"Another turn, another turn," he kept saying. He would glance back from time to time, evidently believing that she would play out before they arrived. She knew this ordeal was a race between distance and energies, but she was standing it like a seasoned trooper. Her rugged life as the Yippee Girl had trained her to take anything. All she hoped was that Bunni wouldn't wear himself out.

Finally they were scouting along a path which brought the towering mountain shaft closer with every step, and she knew this must be it. A bright glow of light filtered down from somewhere near the top of the shaft. For the first time she was seeing the immense "diamond" which Allan and Bunni had previously seen.

The sight arrested her. She felt his hand clutching hers, and there was a little distress signal in his grasp. He urged her with all the words at his command. And so she fought off the fascination of the unbelievable brilliance right overhead.

"One more turn. Two more turns," Bunni said, now all smiles again because she was stepping along rapidly to make up for lost time.

"It's all turns, if you ask me," Sue said, half to herself.

The strangest turn of all had come many hours ago when she and Buni had succeeded in getting some stories of the Evil Scravvzek from a leader of a neighboring village. Now, with the dazzle of the immense diamond "eye" flooding down over every picture in her mind, she was again considering those stories, wondering what evidences of this strange power she would witness when she got inside the mountain.

"The Scravvzek dwells within the earth," they had told her. "It has been at work for centuries. No one knows how it came to be, in the first place. But it has unlimited powers for evil. Do not try to resist it or you will become its victim."

What did it mean? How could one become a victim of an evil power that he had never seen; that he couldn't understand?

"The Evil Scravvzek," they had said, "can burst through the shell of the earth and raise new mountains around it. If you live in a land far away, it can come there too."

Buni had nodded vigorously to this statement, but Sue had been too practical-minded to swallow it. She wanted to know why the Evil Scravvzek was so well known here, and not known in other parts of the world, if this were the case. Why didn't it raise a mountain in the middle of a World Series baseball game, or upset the lawn in front of the state capital while the legislators were sleeping inside?

THEY SHOOK their head to these questions, which involved things much less real to them than the Scravvzek.

"It haunts this region above all others because here there is the gigantic

eye. All conditions are favorable here to bring the whole world into view."

"The whole world?" Again Sue had been as skeptical as a radio listener in the presence of a commercial.

"Everyone can be seen here," one old native had declared. "If you find the Evil Scravvzek, follow him and you will find the mirrors of the world. And there, before your eyes, will be all of your sleeping legislators and your players at the baseball game."

Sue gulped. There was something stupendous in the promise of such a view, though she thought to herself that it was a poor bargain, to come all the way to Africa to look in on the state legislators taking a nap.

All of this was worth thinking over however, now that she was getting closer to the land of the evil power. But it was hardly worth worrying over. Nothing seemed worth too much worry, as long as the mountain air was exhilarating and the friendly little Buni flashed an eager smile at her and led her along by the hand.

They were entering a deep crevice, where the old trail had apparently been walled in by a new growth of mountains—already she was taking it on faith that the mountains had changed since Allan Burgess' previous visit to this place. This must have been the very trail upon which that tragedy of eighty men had occurred.

Now the crevice was closed over. The dark tunnels were before her, branching off like narrow fingers. Buni counted, looked on the floor for a little heap of stones which he had once set up to mark his way, and then chose a course confidently.

For the next hour they moved along cautiously through the semidarkness, feeling their way along the walls.

"Mountains are moving," Buni once

remarked. He left the thought hanging in the air without any explanation. For several minutes she wondered what he meant.

Then as she was passing her hands along the dark wall, she felt the very surfaces of the cool rock spreading under her fingers. And later, when blades of light shot through to illuminate a few steps of their progress, she caught sight of a rising arch. The pillar-like formations were twisting and *growing*, and the very substance of the mountain could be seen yawning and spreading into something wider and deeper.

"Mountains are moving," Buni repeated casually, and he led the way on into the limitless hollow spaces.

At last the mountains appeared to have quieted. The low, distant echoes of far away thunder had come and gone. The tunnels widened. They passed through strangely lighted chambers, brilliant with glowing rocks. Ahead was a curiously shaped formation—several gnarled stalagmites clustered together like the fingers of an old man's hand.

Beyond this, they came into a wide room with a red stone floor.

"This is where I was," Buni said, now growing excited over the familiar sights. "Here I left Koo-Jop. Come on. We go careful."

SUE followed him for a few steps and then stopped short. There was someone—a man—a bleary-eyed man—looking at them. At first sight, he was tucked comfortably in a rounded niche in the wall. But their presence caused him to move clumsily to his feet. There were signs of drunkenness in his motions and still more convincing evidence in his voice.

He yelled at them. "Who's there? Who are you?"

"Don't answer," Buni whispered. "Come. We go past."

They tried to slip by unobtrusively, as if going about their own business. But that wasn't the man's idea. He pounded across the way on unsteady feet.

He roared. "Come here. You gotta report to me. Who the devil are you?"

They stopped. He came toward them slowly and Sue saw that his bleary eyes were feasting upon her. He smeared his whiskers with his puffy brown hand and made a pretense of smoothing his hair. He was a rough looking character. Sue tried to decide whether his soiled costume was meant to be some sort of uniform. Evidently he fancied himself to be a guard.

It was Buni who answered his question. "We Bunjojops"

"Huh? Bunjojops, are you?"

"Let us go," Buni said. "We see Koo-Jop."

"You don't look like no Bunjojops to me. Not you, anyway," he pointed at Sue. "You look t'me like a sweet-heart. A nice, perty sweetheart, come to see me, I betcha. Huh? Whatcha say?"

"I'm an American," Sue Carson said. She smiled a little through her tight lips. She didn't mean to be delayed by any drunken bum who mistook himself for a guard. If this was a sample of the human beings who inhabited this realm, she wasn't impressed. "Who is in charge here, please?"

"I am, by gorr. My name is Gallagher. They call me General Snoozey — I mean General Gallagher. That's what they call me. You kin call me General Say, yer a perty neat gal, by damn. They ain't nothin' like you down here. I reckon we've forgot about all the perty gals, or we wouldn't stay down here."

"Why do you stay down here?"

Sue asked, wondering how she could make her exit gracefully.

"Why th' hell do we? Now there's a question. Whatcha say, you and me an' yer kid get outa here. I kin pack up my things you an' me an' yer kid—is that brown boy yer kid?"

"He's my friend," Sue said, clutching Buni's hand.

"Oh, so that's it. Who's sweetheart are you? Anybody's? Huh? Anybody's? You ain't seen no one since you come down here, have you? I seen ya first. I'm claimin' ya right this minute. C'mere, li'l sweetheart, an' let's have a li'l kiss an' be friends. Howzabout it?"

"You keep it in mind," Sue said, "I've got to go now. You just go back to your post and I'll go this way."

She had no idea *which* way, but she gave an urgent squeeze to Buni's fingers, and he took the hint and led her on.

Gallagher came after them.

Sue whispered. "Walk fast, Buni. Don't run."

They took the first dodge, but the turn placed them in the open. Buni glanced back. "Drop!" he snapped and almost jerked her off her feet. She dropped to the floor. A knife whizzed over and clanged to the floor several feet ahead of them.

BUNI WENT for the knife like a dart. Sue, scrambling to her feet, saw him go into action. He scooped up the knife and came marching back, his eyes blazing.

"Go back!" he yelled at Gallagher. "Go back! I whack you! Go back!"

Gallagher's advance slowed to an uncertain tread and he gradually began to back away. He bumped into the corner of the pillar of stone, and at the touch he jumped like a drunken kangaroo. Buni kept advancing on him, jabbing at him with the knife.

"Gimme my knife," Gallagher whined, backing away again.

"You leave lady alone" Buni said dangerously.

"Hell, I'll leave her alone. How'd I know but what she —" the drunken man was making a disorderly retreat, and he was angered to lose his game and his prize. He mumbled that he wanted his knife.

But Buni knew a good thing when he saw it, and the knife wasn't safe in Gallagher's hands.

Gallagher retreated almost to his bench. Sue motioned to Buni to come on. It occurred to her that there might be other weapons at the bench.

Buni came on the skip and the jump, swinging his knife gayly. For the present they had gotten past Gallagher safely.

They wandered around the corridors of stone, seeking the new directions that might lead them to the Bunjojop tribe. Sue wondered whether Allan and Jimmy had found their way through these same passages many hours before.

It was a stroke of good fortune that came to them in their first hour of searching.

"Bunjojop voices!" Buni declared.

He had stopped abruptly. Now he put his ears to the stone wall. Then he tried the floor. Then the wall again.

"I didnt hear anything," Sue said.

"Bunjojop voices go like this," Buni said, and he waved his lithe hand like waves of water. "I hear them. Up and down. Bunjojop chant."

Then he looked at her with a very serious expression.

"What's the matter, Buni?"

"*Maybe death chant,*" he said.

She tried to talk him out of it. She hadn't heard a thing. But evidently he was on the trail of something. He moved from one side of the corridor

to another, and presently he said, "I hear again. We go this way."

She followed him. Down through a half-formed archway. She agreed that she could hear echoes of voices too.

Buni stopped, looking around, wondering which way to go next.

"I read Boy Scouts," he said. "They wet thumb." He went through the motions of finding which way the wind was coming from.

"That's for wind direction," Sue laughed. "It doesn't help on sound."

He licked his finger and touched his ear. Then turned his head this way and that. "Maybe it help."

Sue laughed at him. His antics were a stall, she guessed. He was not quite stymied as long as he could make a game out of his troubles.

"I hear best this way," he said. And he proceeded to lead her into a dead end path. She was trying to keep a mental picture of the path they had taken, and privately guessed that they would wind up by getting themselves thoroughly lost.

BUT LUCK was with them. On another try, they found a channel that brought the up-and-down voices closer and closer.

It was the Bunjojop chant, Buni declared anxiously. This time he didn't say *death* chant, much to her relief. It was a prayer, he said.

They found a break in the floor of their chosen passage. They looked down through at the lighted chamber below them. The weird green light filtered up to them, and the flash of joy in Buni's eyes was something wonderful to see.

"My trihe," he whispered to her. "They wait for me. They pray for me. Hear?"

The curious chant from hundreds of native African voices was unlike

anything Sue had ever heard before. They were praying in music—praying to a tribal god for the safe deliverance of Buni, and there was a plaintive, pleading quality in their low, whispery voices.

"They pray for me," Buni said. "I go to them."

"There couldn't be a better time," Sue said.

"I come through this floor," Buni said.

He sifted a little dust through the opening, and then a few small stones, trying to attract the attention of the assemblage.

"Koo-jop!" he called down. "Koo-o-Jopp!" He added some native words to his call and ended them with, "Buni!"

Sue, bending close beside him, couldn't get much of the picture, for the opening wasn't large enough for two heads to peek through. Nevertheless, she saw a few of the dark figures beneath the green light, craning to look up at the ceiling a few feet above them, and suddenly they began to shout, "Buni! Buni!"

A few moments of work were required before Buni could rejoin them. He battered at the opening with a stone until it flaked and cracked into something large enough to accommodate his body. Then he lowered himself halfway through it.

He held tight, looking back at Sue. Below him the tribe was yelling joyfully for him to drop. They were ready to catch him.

"You come?" he said to Sue.

"I'll wait here until you've had time to explain about me. I'll be right here when you're ready for me."

The boy smiled and dropped through.

SUE LISTENED to their expressions of joy. The tribal gods

would take new strength from this event, she thought. If the tribal prayers could be answered right on the spot, the gods deserved to prosper.

But as she listened and watched, she could see that all was not pure and unadulterated happiness in the reunion. They were telling Buni something that made him frown. His happiness vanished, and he looked from one to another of the group, evidently sharing the story of some tragedy.

It was more than Sue could hope to understand. Koo-Jop was talking low, trying to give comfort to certain ones who were now weeping softly.

Again they began the low chant with the up-and-down melody which Buni's sharp ears had caught earlier. The death chant. Sue rose and turned—

The light that filtered through these winding tunnels was too dim for her to be sure at first that she was seeing the form of a man moving toward her. She shook her head, rubbed her eyes, gazed. Yes, it was the form of a man.

In another moment she would have heard his blundering footsteps. It was Gallagher. He had followed. He was coming on stealthily. His saggy head turned at every dark corner as if he expected Buni to leap out at him.

But now he saw her. An unholy light flared from his eyes. He gave a low, grating laugh. He steadied his steps. He was only ten good strides away from her.

A panic seized her. Worse than the panics she had known when microphones had been placed in front of her and she was told to say something quick. It was time to do something quick. Like the fox with too many tricks, she was caught for an instant by indecision.

She might try to climb through the opening in the floor, and drop in on the tribe below. Or would she get stuck on the way down?

She might try to run on into the deeper shadows. There was no telling how far this rambling trail might go before it struck a dead end.

She spied Buni's knife. He had laid it aside while working at the floor. She had never tried wielding a weapon of that sort. She'd make an awkward mess of it if she tried something desperate.

"Sweetheart!" Gallagher's voice boomed. "Ran away from me, didn't you. C'mere, sweetheart."

He was eight paces away. It was time to do something.

"I'm coming," she sang out sweetly, and picked up the knife.

CHAPTER XXVII

ALLAN AND Jimmy made tracks toward the wide room with the red stone floor. The mountains had ceased to groan and yawn, and now most of the population of this region had declared an hour of rest.

Allan's plan concerned the glide-walk that Jimmy had once ridden. Jimmy's reported view of many strange things including the first glimpse of the transformed Pakkerman was enough to convince Allan that the region to the east (as he called it) deserved to be explored.

But first, there was a little food packed away along with the parachutes in the Red Room, and Allan had been repeating, for several minutes, the comforting slogan, "Food and rest first. Other things can wait."

They were hungry as a pair of bears after a long winter. They were careful to slip around Gallagher's nest on tiptoes, to avoid waking him. Jimmy's stubbed toe gave him tiptoeing trou-

hle, and Allan decided that a little first aid and a few bours off his feet were what Jimmy needed.

They polished off their food without even making a dent in their hunger. But before they ventured forth again they dropped into sleep and enjoyed an hour or two of oblivion.

Jimmy awakened Allan.

Allan roused out of his parachute comforter and wanted to know what was the matter. Wasn't that toe bandage comfortable, or were the stalagmite springs in his bed too solid?

"I hear voices," Jimmy said. "Didn't you hear 'em?"

"Didn't hear a thing."

"Musta been in my dream, but I thought I heard Yippee." Jimmy looked sad. "Why'd I have to wake up?"

"Why don't you let me have some of those dreams?" Allan said. Then growing wider awake he listened. He had noticed before that Jimmy's good ears missed nothing. Maybe he had heard Yippee. "Come on, let's go down and pay our respects to Gallagher. I'm still hungry and he may have some food tucked away that we need for our desert."

"He'll have some bad liquor, or I'll miss my guess," said Jimmy.

"Then he probably neglects his good food. We'll see."

Gallagher wasn't there.

They looked around. They had seen him half asleep at his usual post when they passed before. But he was gone now.

"You go back and finish your rest," Allan said. "I'm going to look around a little."

Jimmy admitted that he could use another hour's sleep, but he was tantalized by the thought that Yippee might have found her way into this region. It seemed unlikely; yet if it had happened, she could easily get

lost and no one would ever know. Allan agreed that it would be an awful thing if she should happen to be whisked away on the glide-walk, which went—where?

"Tell you what I'll do," Jimmy said. "I'll bed down over at the glide-walk entrance where you lost me that time. You take your time, an' I'll pamper my stubbed toe an' get some more sleep. Okay?"

"Okay."

Alone, Allan hastily explored the area around Gallagher's nest. Within a few minutes he discovered some footsteps that looked interesting. Tracks of small hare feet. And with them the tracks of a small flat-heeled shoe such as Sue Carson had worn.

The thin layer of rock dust that had settled in a few places since the uproar of the Scravvrek was enough to show the prints as clearly as chalk marks. This was a recent trail. It was the trail of Sue Carson and Buni!

HE FOLLOWED away from the Red Room, and occasionally he was disturbed by the trail of certain Gallagher-like steps that crossed Sue's path. Something in the leaps and bounds of Buni's tracks looked highly suspicious. There had been action here.

He pounded along the trail as rapidly as he could go. Occasionally through dark passages he stopped and used the flare from his cigaret lighter to make sure he was right.

Within a few minutes he was stopped by the sound of a familiar call.

"Yippeece!"

It came from away off in the distance. It echoed through the walls musically.

"Yippeece!" It came again.

"Ye gods, the gal's in trouble," Allan said under his breath, and he

sprinted again, leaping the black rocks in his path. He couldn't help thinking how a drunken Gallagher might behave at the sight of Sue Carson.

He was hearing things again as soon as he turned the next bend. It was Yippee's voice, and the song was interspersed with an occasional *yip-pee*, just as if her audience demanded that she color it up with a few trademarks along the way. There was song enough bouncing through these walls to fill Carnegie Hall.

A moment later Allan discovered that the audience consisted of one entranced listener.

Shaggy, sagging Gallagher was leaning against the wall, head forward, eyes bugging in drunken appreciation, a frozen slap-happy smile on his grizzled face.

Yippee was giving him a song and dance worthy of a hundred-thousand dollar audience. It was a knife dance!

Allan paused in the shadows, fascinated.

The girl swung the knife around in swirls and figure eights and rick-rack, parabolas and crosshatch. At frequent intervals she would skip toward Gallagher and slice the air in front of him as if she meant to divide a button on his uniform. That would tickle Gallagher, and he would laugh like a schoolboy at the circus.

She started backing away, as if to ease her way out of his presence while he was guffawing.

He didn't like that part of the program, however. He stepped forward.

"Hey, come back! Show ain't over yet."

"Show's over," Yippee sang out, interrupting her song. "Next performance tomorrow."

"You promised me a double feature, sweetheart. Come on, now!" His

hands began to knot into fists and he stalked toward her.

"One more song," she said. "Keep your seat. The show isn't over."

"That's better," he grumbled.

"I'll sing you the one I did for the governor's rally. It's called Keep the Flag Flying. Here goes—"

"I don't want that stuff. How 'bout Let Me Call You Sweetheart?" That menacing look was coming her way again. "That's what I want. Sweetheart, huh? Howzabout it? Here, you gimme the knife so you kin sing nice. Huh?"

But Sue went into her song making good use of the knife. It became the bow at work over an invisible violin. Her rendition, Allan thought, was probably the most unique Let-Me-Call-You-Sweetheart in history.

ALLAN couldn't refrain from joining in on the last bar, like the hero of a comic opera walking in on the stage at the last moment when the maiden in distress believes that all is lost. He cupped his hands and sang out, "*I'm in lo-o-ove with you-u-u!*"

Sue didn't quite hit the ceiling. She didn't quite throw the knife, but almost. She swung about and came running to Allan like a lost lamb. Her eyes shone with such a funny smile that he thought she was going to cry.

"Here!" she said breathless. "Take the knife. It goes with the song."

"Keep it, pal, you're doing fine."

"I was at the end of my rope, honest. You've saved me!" she whispered tensely.

"Baloney," Allan chuckled. Don't try to make me believe you were frightened of that heap of rags." Then he shot a stern eye at Gallagher. "Gallagher!"

"Sir?" The drunken man must have thought he was seeing things. He sobered a little. With an unsteady hand he gave a polite swipe to his tousled hair. "You call me, sir? I wasn't doin' nothin' captain. The gal offered to sing me a song, sir. I wasn't doin' nothin'."

"That's enough, Gallagher."

"Yes sir."

"Report for duty at once, Gallagher."

The flustered fellow saluted. "Yes sir. Where do I report, sir?"

"Right here. Step ahead of us, Gallagher. We need food. Go find some food for us. Don't say a word to anyone. Understand? Have the food at your post in twenty minutes."

"I'll try, sir."

Gallagher turned and made a heroic effort to march away in a single direction. He looked back to give Sue Carson a sad and hungry look, and then squared his shoulders and stumped off through the tunnel.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THEN THEY were alone—Allan and Sue. Allan was suddenly quite aware that they were alone. It was a situation he wasn't quite ready for. But he knew it was wonderfully good to have her with him again. He'd been far more worried than he had allowed Jimmy to know.

"How'd you get here, Sue?"

"It wasn't impossible. I'm used to travelling, you know."

"Well, I'm sure surprised to see you." Allan swallowed in the middle of his sentence and felt awkward over it. He whistled a few notes, trying to be casual. Then discovering he had echoed the last line of "Let Me Call You Sweetheart," he broke off abruptly. He repeated, "I sure am surprised."

"Pleasantly, I hope."

"Sure," He gave her a wink. She smiled, and he quickly decided to march her back to the Red Room without lagging along the way. He was in danger of liking that smile too well. The softly glowing rocks overhead made her prettier than he had ever seen her before. But when had he ever really noticed her before? All the way across the Atlantic and Western Africa he'd been too intent on his purpose to allow his interest to go astray.

"We'll march right back to the Red Room," he said.

"Time out," she said. "My poor achin' dogs."

She stopped to shake the rock dust out of her shoes. He sat down beside her. She wiggled her stockinged toes and gave a relieved, "Ah!"

"Don't tell me you came all the way up this mountain on foot."

"Sure did."

"My stars. It's a good thing your New York agent doesn't know about this."

She looked up quizzically. "You mean about my sitting here with you?"

"Well, I thought maybe he—"

"Oh, he's twice my age, and bald, and strictly business."

Allan hadn't meant that at all. Still it was worth knowing. He winked at her again and dropped a pebble in her shoe, which she promptly removed and tried to put in the collar of his shirt. He caught her and held it on a pretext of self defense.

"What I mean is," he resumed, "I thought you'd be on your way back to America before this time. Did someone show you the trail, or how did you find your way?"

"Buni's with me."

"Buni? Where is he?"

"Back that way. With his tribe. We

heard them singing a death dirge and found them right away. Sheer luck. It's a wonder we didn't lose ourselves in some bottomless crevice. I think the gods must watch over that little rascal. Anyway he's a dear. I'll have to go back and report to him before I stray off. I promised."

ALLAN agreed. This was the best of news. One of his biggest worries of the past hour had been the fate of the tribe. From all indications, they had penned themselves up in a niche for temporary safety. But in a matter of time they would be starved out or driven out by violence. They were on Sully's waiting list.

"This is a break. You've no idea what this means." He rose and gestured as if conferring honors upon her. "Step right up, Miss Carson, and claim your prize. An orchid for the little lady in the red, white and blue dress, ladies and gentlemen!"

"Why all the fanfare?" she asked as he helped her to her feet.

"Simply because this means there's a way out for the Bunjojops. What you and Buni have done will mean the difference between life and death to Koo-Jop and all his people."

"Really. Is it that serious?"

"I'll tell you all about it shortly. You'd better lead me back to Koo-Jop. It's urgent that I have a word with him. But first—" He stood, looking at her, fascinated by the light that danced in her eyes. He was holding her hands lightly.

"First?" she echoed.

"First, tell me. Why did you come?"

She gave a little mischievous shrug. "Shall I beat around the bush about it, or do you want a direct answer?"

"Direct."

"Okay, Captain." She bent toward him and kissed him. "There."

He nodded slightly and said noth-

ing. Afterward he wondered why he hadn't complained that her answer was too brief. But it was an answer. One worth thinking over. There would be time to think it over later. Just now he obeyed an urge to return the kiss. He drew her into his arms and held her closely, and his lips brushed over her cheeks and sought her lips. His arms tightened, and for the passing moment he knew that no trembling mountains would dare to intrude.

Presently she said, quietly, "We had better go and find Koo-Jop."

"Yes."

"He'll want to see you."

"Sure." He held her, and her breath was warm against his face.

"I promised Buni—"

"We'll go now," he said. "Lead the way."

"Just a few steps back. You'll hear their singing as soon as we round the bend. They were chanting and praying."

"Then we shouldn't interrupt them yet." He caught her hands again. "We could sit a little while."

"Shall we?"

"Aren't there some more pebbles in your shoes?"

"I think there are," she said.

"I've lots of things to tell you," he said, sitting down beside her. "Things have happened since we dropped from your plane."

He told his adventures, swiftly, sketchily, allowing her to fill the gaps with little gasps of wonderment.

THE EIGHTY were still alive! The fortune teller must have had some inside information. How they had beat death was a mystery. They had withstood bullets. They had fallen over cliffs. And they had come through whole. Only the name "Scravvzek" explained it.

"The Scravvzek power had them well in hand before that seeming tragedy ever occurred, I'm convinced," Allan said. The invisible hands that could shake mountain walls could certainly catch falling bodies or heal wounded flesh.

As Allan went on with his story, Sue grew alarmed.

"Then they haven't accepted you as their captain!"

"Far from it."

"And though you came to rescue them, they're not cooperating?"

"They don't cooperate. They murder."

"After what happened, they'll be searching for you."

"Like bloodhounds."

"Then what are you going to do? Can you do anything for them? Or are they hopeless?"

"They're pretty far gone," Allan admitted. "I had hoped I could make them over somehow. But this thing has got an awful grip on them. And some of them were never the type to have faith in a captain. Sully, for example. Actually, I haven't done anything so far but antagonize them. They talk about winning honors from the Scravvzek. All the ambition they contain is evil."

Sue Carson shook her head. She had known plenty of disillusionment, privately, in her jobs of ballyhooing for some political rings. She saw no future in Allan's undertaking.

"Is there any reason you shouldn't shake the dust of this place off your feet?"

Allan unconsciously clenched his fists. There were reasons as important as life itself, he replied. The fortune teller had hinted it. Now he saw it plainly. The strange powers of this insidious force were at work on a world scale. The servants of the

Scravvzek believed that men of this world were bent on destroying themselves. The Scravvzek power would help them succeed.

"It's a dangerous thing to meddle with," he admitted, and a wave of perspiration came to his forehead as he recalled his encounter. "What it is can't be told. It can be seen only in part. It seems to be a monstrous something with eyes of fire. And fingers of fire. But after you watch it a few minutes you know it's lots more than that. It's mostly invisible. The strangest thing is that it has to have a human being to do its talking. It holds someone in its giant fingers, and slips a big ball of fire over the person's head, and then its voice comes through in the words of its spokesman."

"I don't know how you can fight a thing like that."

Allan didn't have a very satisfactory answer.

"You must have a lot of faith in yourself even to try."

"I had faith that I'd find a plane to take me over to Africa," Allan said. "And look what a miracle came to my rescue. *You*."

"I happened to have a plane. That's simple. But I don't have a pull with the Scravvzek."

"But someone might."

"Who?"

"Doc Pakkerman. Jimmy's old hero from Maple City. He's the one the Scravvzek used for a mouthpiece. When last seen, he was shoving off for the Black River, somewhere over *that* way," Allan said, struggling to regain his sense of directions. "And there was a big hint that he hangs around some larger world of caves, beyond this 'doorstep.' As I get it, there must be a lot more of this underground world beyond the river. Some-

where there's an instrument they call the '*mirror of the world*,' where a lot can be learned about what people are doing."

"I've heard about it!" Sue was suddenly enthusiastic.

"What do you know of it?"

"Buni and I gathered some dope at another native village. They said this Scravvzek has been a well known legend in these parts for centuries. And they spoke of the *mirrors*. Well, Captain, how soon do we start?"

ALLAN tapped his fist against her shoulder. "I'd be a heel to let you walk into any such danger. It's already open season on me, remember."

"How soon do we start?"

Allan came back to a consciousness of passing time. The Bunjojops must be contacted. Gallagher was probably waiting with food. Jimmy was no doubt growing impatient, waiting at the glide-walk.

"My stars! Poor Jimmy! He'll wonder what's happened."

"I'm anxious to see him," Sue said.

"Sure Guess I've sort of monopolized you here. We'll go back to him as soon as we've contacted Koo-Jop."

A few minutes later, after they had exchanged words with Koo-Jop and Buni, they hiked along to their other destinations. Allan thought of Jimmy, and how surprised he would be to see Yippee again.

"Jimmy'll be wondering why you came back too," Allan said.

"Will he?"

"He'll probably ask you, just like I did."

Sue didn't comment.

"Will you beat around the bush,"

Allan asked, "or give him a direct answer?"

Sue kept walking. Allan strode along at her side, trying to read her expression.

"I suppose," Allan continued, "that you'll have to tell him just like you told me."

"Why?"

"Well, you don't have to, as far as I'm concerned," Allan said with rather too much conviction. "But you're so darned fair that I suppose you will."

Sue Carson laughed and said lightly, "I guess anyone likes a direct answer now and then. Sure, I'll—"

Half an hour later Sue greeted Jimmy with a kiss, delivered as enthusiastically as if there had been cameras. Jimmy blushed and rolled his eyes comically toward Allan and emitted a string of oh-golly-goshes that did justice to the occasion." As they mounted the glide-walk, Allan and Jimmy knew they were the two luckiest men in the continent, to have such a girl as Sue Carson for a third partner.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE GLIDE-WALK moved along silently through the pitch-black tunnel. Allan listened to Sue and Jimmy conversing in whispers. It was like watching a thermometer rise under a stream of sunshine, to see how Jimmy's spirit lifted. Sue was the tonic he needed. Even his stubbed toe felt better.

As Sue told him the good news about Buni finding the tribe, Jimmy acted as if a burden had slipped from his back. Allan knew he had been worried over the fate of the Banjojops. During the Scravvzek earthquake Jimmy had frequently spoken of them, locked as they were within a crowded corner of the canyon.

"Then they can get out?" Jimmy asked. "They'll make their escape through the passage that Buni found?"

"That's what we hope," Allan said. "Sue and I drove the point home with Buni just before we left. And Koo-Jop too. But the poor old chief was too melancholy to say much. We advised them to build stone steps up to the ceiling and get themselves out as fast as possible. They'd have no trouble by-passing Gallagher. And Buni could lead them over his own trail out of the mountain and back to the village."

"That's good. That's darned good," Jimmy said. "Buni and Sue deserve medals for this."

Sue laughed. "The Captain has already awarded me an orchid. I'm getting lots of awards today."

Jimmy remarked that he hadn't seen the orchid; and where would one find an orchid down in this lost land? Sue had to admit the orchid hadn't been delivered. "But I'll see that the captain makes his promise good if we get back to New York."

"Did you say *if*?" Jimmy echoed. They rode along in silence, huddled close together. The tunnel was pitch black. The glide-walk curved gently, with hardly a sound from the track beneath.

"Someone say something," Sue said. "I don't like conversations that end on *if*."

"What's wrong with *if*?"

"It's a worry word. It sounds like

we all three know we'll never get back alive."

"Things like that do happen," Jimmy said with a shrug.

Allan changed the subject. "I'm afraid Koo-Jop won't get his people out. They're in a double trap. One of stones. One of grief. They may stay there for hours while the hereaved women weep."

"It's too bad," Sue said. "Such an unfair thing. It must have stunned them."

"Those long-winded rituals could be their downfall. They're afraid of offending the tribal god that has taken care of them. But if they don't get out, they'll put their god to a lot more trouble. Allan grew philosophical. "Tribal gods are necessary and all that. But there are times when men ought to depend on their own two legs and leave the praying until later."

"Like the two little boys on their way to school," Sue said. "Little Johnny and his brother."

"Never met 'em," Jimmy said.

"You've heard the story. Two little boys were about to be late for school, and little Johnny said, 'Let's stop and pray that we won't be late,' and his big brother said, 'Let's keep hiking and pray while we hike.'"

(To Be Concluded Next Month)

MAN, THE FOCAL CENTER?

By William Karney

THERE IS a field of philosophy known as Anthropocentric Philosophy. Basically, this philosophy treats man to the distinction of being the center of all things. Two of the classic greats were in one sense or another adherents to this belief—Socrates and Protagoras. Socrates confined himself to the study of human conduct, while Protagoras held that man was virtu-

ally the measure of everything. It may be assumed that the earth was looked upon as the center of the world we know for so long because following this anthropocentric outlook, man, in his extreme lack of modesty, considered himself the ultimate end of the universe.

Opposing this view were men like Spinoza, who held the view that man and man's

world, were but merely minor parts of the great cosmos.

It can be understood then far more easily, when we consider this anthropocentric philosophy, just why it was in earlier days that a great portion of the men of the world felt, for example, that the earth was indeed flat. Man's ego had decided that there could be nothing existent beyond the range of influence controlled by man. Thus, should a man travel beyond a section that was "known", he would surely be "lost."

It must have come as a great shock indeed then when Columbus entered the "lost" zone and finally returned, hale and hearty, with grand stories of the "new world" and bringing the evidences with him to prove it.

It can be argued, and strongly so, that the anthropocentric philosophy, treating man as the focal center of all things, is not only naive, but actually ridiculous. Probably the greatest lesson the layman may learn himself, using the logic of his own reasoning ability, is to gaze into the heavens at night and look at the stars he sees in the sky.

When one considers the fact that modern science has given us, that there are stars

in the heavens thousands of light years away, whose light we see now left those stars ages ago; that there are stars whose light we are just beginning to see; that there are stars whose light has not even reached us as yet—when we consider these staggering facts and look at those stars, we can indeed feel small, as indeed, man is in the cosmic scheme of things.

This of course is not the anthropocentric way of looking at things, but then, man has learned much since the time of Socrates, and man will, in the future, learn much more. The big question is, will he ever learn the ultimate answer to his place in the universe? That question has been pondered by philosophers through the ages, from Socrates to the present day. And, as a matter of fact, long before Socrates ever lived.

Modern science is doing much to help resolve this question. Science and philosophy today are working together more than ever before. What will be the ultimate result one cannot say. All we seem to know is that man, while he is certainly not the focal point of all things, is certainly an integral part. Just how great a part remains to be determined.

KING OF THE GODS

By A. MORRIS

IN BABYLONIAN mythology, Anu is considered the highest of the Gods, father and king, actually. To him fell the signal honor of control of the heavens. But it was not upon Anu that ultimate fame among the Gods was resolved, it was instead, his daughter, Ishtar, Goddess of the Heavens, whose name has come down to us through the centuries. And probably every lover of science-fiction is familiar with the great novel projected around this famous daughter of Anu, for Abraham Merritt wrote his famed "The Ship of Ishtar" with the Goddess as a key figure.

What happened to Anu himself? Once his daughter came into her own as "Queen of the Heavens", the King of the Gods became a ruler in name only. His was the sad fate to sit by and watch his own offspring wield authority over him. But then, Ishtar, one of the most beautiful of all deities, was worth watching. And Anu, to this day, in whatever mythical land he resides, is probably watching with pleasure the rule of his daughter queen.

GRECIAN THANKSGIVING

By JON BARRY

OUR FESTIVAL of Thanksgiving is a time when we all get together for family discussions over a sumptuous hanquet. And even though this festival is many years old, it is a relative child on the pages of historic festivals.

Take the Greek festival of Apaturia, for example. This three-day holiday dates back to B.C. times. It was an occasion where families and friends got together, just as we do today, over a sumptuous hanquet. On the first day it was the custom to dine in lavish fashion, and knowing Greek history, one can well imagine the huge repast that would be presented! Then on the second day a sacrifice of oxen was made in thanksgiving to the God Zeus. Finally, on the third day, children born since the last festival were presented for registration. It can readily be seen that the Greeks utilized their festival for business and pleasure, whereas today our holidays are almost exclusively designed for the "good time" we all like. But like the ancient Greeks, we have our sentiment too. —And many a stomach ache along with it for overeating!



8 In the darkness his body glowed with an eerie light as he floated beside the house...

HAUNTED HOUSE

By GUY ARCHETTE

Grevellon was very interested in the haunted house, and just what was haunting it —for he was something of a haunt too . . .

"BUT SOMETHING must have happened to the man!" Ed Clough protested. "He just couldn't have vanished into thin air!"

Tom Morgan angrily pulled a blackened pipe from between equally blackened teeth. "Listen, Ed, just because I'm sheriff don't mean I have to have more imagination than anybody else. I know just as much of the facts as you do, and if you can't make anything out of them, how can I?"

"Well, my readers have to have your opinion, sheriff," Clough replied placatingly. "They pay their taxes, and they want to be sure that the Law's smart enough to give them their money's worth in the way of protection."

"Be that as it may!" Morgan snapped. "They can't expect no Sherlock Holmes for what they're paying me. I'm doing the best I can with the material I have to work with. And as far as that goes, Ed, kindly remember

this is Scott Center, population five-thousand. Trouble with you is, you see too many movies of the way those big-city editors do things."

Morgan had struck home to a vital spot. Clough flushed and subsided. The youthful editor of the *Scott Center Daily* was proud of his little newspaper out of all proportion to its size. And he *did* want terribly to do things the way big-city editors in the movies did them.

Morgan turned and seated himself on the edge of his battered desk. "Now look, men, I'm going into this once more, and then I'm through."

There was an abrupt return of tension inside the tiny jail office. The small group of men gathered there, seated on what few chairs were in evidence or standing against the walls, eyed the Sheriff expectantly. The sounds of lazy activity from the town outside penetrated dimly.

Morgan cleared his throat. "All right," he began. "The man who dis-

appeared, James Norris, appeared in town Tuesday morning, and registered at Walt Enderby's hotel. That right, Walt?"

Walt Enderby nodded quickly, his round face slightly self-conscious. "That's right, Sheriff. Just three days ago."

"What can you tell us about the man, Walt?"

Enderby shrugged. "Well, Norris was a pretty queer gent. Tall and skinny, with a sort of dead, white face and funny black eyes that never blinked."

"Just like gangsters in the movies!" Clough broke in excitedly. "I'll bet he was a gangster from Chicago. Or maybe New York."

"He said he was a private detective," Enderby defended. "Even had a hadge."

"That's the funny part of it," Morgan said slowly. "I checked up on all the private detective agencies, but none had a man by the name of Norris working for them."

"He must have been a gangster," Clough repeated.

Morgan shrugged. "Go on, Walt."

"Well, whatever he was, Norris must have had a lot of money. Wanted the best room I had, and paid for it in advance. Tuesday afternoon he told me to take out his suit for pressing. It was all wrinkled up, like he'd been sleeping in it a lot. But I could see it was a mighty good one. He didn't have much luggage with him. Just a sort of small overnight case, which he never seemed to let out of his sight."

"Did he say what he was doing here in Scott Center?" Morgan prompted.

ENDERBY nodded eagerly.

"He did, Sheriff. You see, when Norris first came in, he didn't have much to say. Talked low and funny,

too, like there was something wrong with his throat. And with that face and eyes of his, I didn't feel like asking any questions.

"But Wednesday morning he opened up. Told me he was a private detective, and showed me his hadge. Then he told me as how he was looking for a man named Edward Carter. He told me he had trailed Carter as far as Scott Center and wanted to know if anyone had seen or heard of him here."

"Did Norris describe this Edward Carter?" Morgan asked.

"Yes, Sheriff—and here's another funny thing. He said Carter looked just like him—almost as if he was a twin brother or something! But I told him I hadn't seen anybody like Carter around town, and he seemed sort of disappointed."

"Then we got to talking. Norris wasn't such a bad sort in spite of the way he looked and spoke. I told him about the haunted house outside of town, Clifton Manor, and the funny lights and noises. He seemed interested, because he asked me a lot of questions about the place. I told him all I knew of the mysterious things that have been going on there, and I'll swear he got real excited. Then, that night, he got into his car with that little overnight case of his and drove away, without ever telling me a word of what he was going to do. And that was the last I saw of him."

Morgan turned to Craig Harriman. "You're the one who found Norris' car, weren't you, Craig?"

Harriman hobbled his untidy white head. "Yep, Sheriff. It was standin' a little distance from the old Clifton house. I passed it as I was startin' out on my rounds with the mail Thursday mornin', an' it was still there when I came back in the afternoon. I looked inside an' it was all

empty and deserted-like. Seemed funny to me, an' that's why I reported it to you."

"You did right, Craig." Morgan gestured with his pipe. "I went to Clifton Manor and found the car where Craig said it was. Then I examined the house and grounds, hut I didn't find a single trace of Norris." He paused and his shrewd grey eyes became somber. "Now listen, men, I ain't ready to go on record as saying Clifton Manor is haunted, hut something mighty funny happened there around the time Norris went into it. The first and second floors were all dusty and empty, but the cellar.... The cellar was empty, too, hut something had happened inside it."

Morgan stared reflectively out of the grimy office window. The men were silent, avoiding each others' eyes. Outside the dusk of evening thickened slowly in the streets of the town.

MORGAN twisted around and picked up several small objects that had been laying in a cluster on his desk top. "That cellar had been lived in," he continued. "Or at least someone had used it for something. It wasn't dirty, and damp, the way cellars usually are. It was clean and dry and there was a sort of sharp, burned smell in the air. The floor and walls were all covered with funny holes, some of them three feet deep and more, that looked like they'd been burned in with a whopping big blowtorch. No—not exactly that. It was more sort of like a blowtorch that could cut a piece off something without melting the rest. The edges of those holes were mighty sharp and the insides weren't hurned at all.

"Now seems to me like there had been something in that cellar and the

blowtorch thing had sort of all hurned it away, leaving those holes in the floor and walls. All that was left was these little pieces of glass and metal." Morgan extended the fragments in his open palm and the men hent forward to peer at them with awed curiosity.

"You'll notice," Morgan went on, "that these pieces aren't dirty or rusty at all. They'd been left there in the cellar mighty recent. As recent as—say, the night Norris went into Clifton Manor." Morgan took a deep breath. "Well, that's that. Most likely we'll never know what happened down there in the cellar, hut it's a pretty good bet Norris was somehow connected with it. And what happened to him we'll probably never know either. Maybe he got hurned up by the blowtorch thing, or maybe he just left his car and walked away. Your guesses would be as good as mine."

The men remained silent. Several shifted uneasily.

Morgan looked at Clough and his grey eyes became faintly sardonic. "Well, Ed, what have you got to say now?"

Clough started nervously. "Eh—oh, nothing, sheriff." Suddenly he grinned. "But anyway this is going to make a peach of a story for the paper!"

"Haunted!" Enderby muttered. "I always knew it was haunted. All those funny lights and everything—"

"HAUNTED, Mr. Enderby?" James Norris' glittering yet strangely blank black eyes abruptly left their steady perusal of the street beyond the verandah.

Walt Enderby nodded emphatically. "That's right, sir. Clifton Manor is haunted."

"Just what is your definition of a

haunted house, Mr. Enderby?" Norris asked.

Enderby scratched the back of his greying head thoughtfully. "Well, it's an old house where nobody lives, but which has mysterious lights and noises in it at night."

"I see. Do things of this nature occur at Cliffton Manor at night?"

"You bet they do!"

"Have you any knowledge of the agency which causes them?"

"Well, no. Not exactly. But most everybody believes that it's ghosts in haunted houses which do things like that."

The poker-faced expression of Norris' features did not change, yet he seemed to radiate a faint amusement. "Ghosts? You mean supernatural beings, don't you, Mr. Enderby?"

"That's right," Enderby agreed. "Things not of this world."

"Not of this world!" Norris breathed. Suddenly he was sitting straight and tense in the wicker chair.

"Eh? What did you say, sir?"

Norris' long, thin form relaxed. "It was nothing pertinent to our discussion," he answered slowly. He was silent a moment. "Tell me, Mr. Enderby, how long have these strange events been taking place at Cliffton Manor?"

"Let me see now." Enderby rubbed his plump chin ruminatively. "Why, say, that's funny!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Only a little over a year, the way I recall."

"A year!" Norris' low, hoarse voice was vibrant with something that might have been excitement. Once again his form was straight and tense in the wicker chair. His eyes were turned toward the street, but he seemed to be looking into a far distance.

Enderby smiled ruefully. "I know

it sounds funny, but I haven't really thought about that myself until now. You see, folks were saying as how the place was haunted even when I was a boy, so I grew up just sort of *believing* the old house was haunted. But I recollect now that the lights and noises didn't start until a little over a year ago. Guess folks just believed Cliffton Manor was haunted for so long that when funny things started going on inside it they weren't surprised at all."

Norris nodded stiffly. "I see. Look, Mr. Enderby, can you describe what you called 'lights and noises'?"

"Well, most of it's what I heard from others. But I *did* go past the old place once last fall. Folks usually stay away from Cliffton Manor at night, you see. With all them strange goings on it isn't wise to take chances, and—"

"Please describe the supernatural manifestations, Mr. Enderby."

"Sure, sure. Well, the time I went past, the house was covered with a sort of pale blue light—"

"Like a bubble?" Norris broke in tensely.

"That's it. Sort of like a bubble. And faint flashes of light came out of the walls of the house—right out, just like it went straight through the bricks. And a high, buzzing sound came out of it, too, with a sort of deeper hum breaking in once in a while. Let me tell you, it's spooky! Specially when everything's all dark and quiet."

"I can well imagine that, Mr. Enderby. And you say this has been going on for a little over a year?"

"That's right," Enderby replied grimly.

NORRIS LEANED forward. "I can't understand how people

manage to avoid the house, Mr. Enderby. For this to be conveniently possible, it would have to be located quite a good distance from Scott Center."

"It isn't at all. It's only about four miles from town. But you see it's on old Forest Road, and folks don't use it any more, except as a short cut to the main highway once in a while."

"Forest Road branches off from the highway?"

"That's right. And Clifton Manor is about two miles down along it."

"I presume it would be a gravel road, but I don't recall passing anything of the sort on my way into Scott Center."

"Then you must have come west. Forest Road is about a mile east on the main highway. And it's just plain mud. Wasn't no sense in fixing it up if folks don't use it much."

"That's correct, of course." Norris sat back in his chair and his black eyes settled once more upon the street. "Well, thank you, Mr. Enderby. I assure you this has been a very interesting talk."

Enderby hesitated uncertainly, recognizing the obvious dismissal. His garrulity, however, was by no means exhausted. But the sound of his name being called by someone within the hotel abruptly decided his next move.

"Walt! Oh, Walt!"

Enderby sighed. "My wife," he explained. "Excuse me, Mr. Norris."

Norris gave a short nod, and Enderby hurried into the hotel. Norris remained on the verandah, in his wicker chair, staring out into the street. Within him excitement burned like a fierce, all-consuming flame. His mind rang with triumphant thoughts.

At last! A real lead after more than two weary years of fruitless

searching. It had to be him—it just had to be. The signs couldn't indicate anything else. And if it was—Norris' thoughts became cold, grim, and horribly determined. He wouldn't fail again. He knew all the other's tricks by now.

Norris kept his eagerness and impatience tightly in check. If what Enderby had told him turned out to be as he hoped, terrible danger lurked ahead. His next moves had to be made with consummate skill and caution.

And then—Norris allowed himself a brief pang of wistful longing. Then he would be going home. Home! The thought shot like an electric current through his body.

It would be good to be back once more where things were familiar. It would be good to rest...

NORRIS remained on the verandah until noon. Then he picked up the overnight case which had been resting beside his chair and went into the hotel. Lunch was his usual simple meal of milk and fruit juices. He had explained to Enderby that his weak stomach couldn't take anything else. Digestive trouble. He was tired, too, tired of explaining...

Later he went up to his room and stretched out on the bed. He tried to sleep, to catch up a little on the rest of which he had deprived himself for so long. But he couldn't shake off his tenseness, and his thoughts kaleidoscoped madly. He shook himself impatiently, a little dismayed at the signs of degeneration which had set into him. The information which Enderby had divulged seemed further to have weakened his former rigid self-control.

It wasn't until the middle of the afternoon that Norris managed to doze off to sleep. When he awoke

the dusk of evening was thickening inside his room. He lay still on the bed, watching the rose and gold of the setting sun fade slowly from the horizon. The purple sky darkened to black and the stars appeared in their jewel-like splendor.

Finally Norris swung off the bed. He shrugged into his coat and hat, picked up the overnight case, and left the room. Enderby and several others were sitting on the verandah. Norris gave them a short nod and walked quickly to his car parked before the curb. He placed the overnight case carefully on the seat beside him and started the motor.

Norris headed east on the main highway, watching the mileage meter. When he had gone a half-mile, he cut speed, scanning both sides of the highway as he cruised slowly along. Shortly he found the branch which was old Forest Road. He swung down it, watching the mileage meter again.

Norris found the house approximately three miles down the road. Clifton Manor stood on a lonely hilltop, looming squat and black against the night sky. And it was queer. It seemed to be enveloped in a pale, blue hubble that shimmered and wavered like smoke. The flashes of light of which Enderby had spoken were not in evidence, but a thin, huzzing sound emanated from the ancient structure.

Norris parked his car and turned off the lights while still a good distance away. He picked up the overnight case and let himself out to the road. He started walking toward the house, every sense alert. Once he glanced back at the car standing dark and silent in the road side. Perhaps he would never need it again. He hoped not.

Norris approached the hubble cau-

tiously. He knew it was a screen of tremendously destructive energy. To touch it meant instant, horrible death. Its radius extended some fifty feet from the house, and it was from this that the huzzing sound arose.

Norris bent and opened the overnight case. Within its interior several bulky objects gleamed metallically. One was a thick, heavy belt, and this Norris buckled about his waist. Then he withdrew a small pack, which he strapped to his shoulders. The remaining object was something that appeared to be an exceptionally large flashlight. Norris adjusted a small dial on the surface of this, then pointed it at the now empty case. There was a faint hum, and a green radiance poured from its orifice. The overnight case vanished.

THEN NORRIS' fingers touched his belt, and a pale, blue shell shimmered about him that was in every respect similar to the one which surrounded the house. He walked through the destructive screen. Smaller and larger merely blended an instant with no apparent disturbance to either, and then he was through.

His movements now became swift and determined. He pressed a stud on the strap of the pack about his shoulders and lifted into the air. He soared up and toward the house. A large window gaped emptily on the second floor. He snapped off his screen and floated through.

Norris found himself in a large room that had once served as a bed chamber. Hovering in the air, he made further adjustments on his belt. Another screen surrounded him, a luminous white one this time. Like a glowing spectre, he floated out into the hall and down the staircase.

At the bottom floor he stopped, sus-

pended weightlessly in the air. About him the old house was very dark and still. A dim glow showed in the grimy windows from the field outside.

Norris peered about him, with eyes adjusted cat-like to the gloom. Before him was a broad foyer. To his right a narrow passage ran into the obscure depths of the house beyond. To his left a doorway opened up into what had once been a vast living room. Norris floated into this, his progress infinitely slow and careful. Across the length of the room he inched, through a gaping doorway and into another whose empty and dust-laden shelves showed it to have been a library. There was no other doorway here, and Norris retraced his path back into the living room. And then he saw the double-doored entrance to the dining room. He floated through this, then poised motionlessly, warned by a sudden sense of danger.

It wasn't premonition. It was merely that thoughts of a power and intensity equal to his own had momentarily impinged upon his mind.

Norris' perceptions thrilled with realization of what that brief mental contact meant. His hopes hadn't been in vain after all. What he sought was here!

Pierce exultation flamed through him. His quest was at an end.

Norris waited there in the center of the dark and deserted dining room, hovering midway between floor and ceiling. The flashlight-like instrument was gripped tightly in his hands. His every sense was pitched to its highest peak of alertness.

Abruptly, the door to the kitchen crashed open. A report like thunder echoed through the house, and dust clouds billowed up. Through the pall floated a glowing sphere similar to

the one in which Norris was encased.

But the figure within it bore little resemblance to a man. It was a creature, hideous and alien. It had a round, hairless head in which were set two great amber eyes and a tiny, puckered mouth. It had no nose, but slits at each side of its head appeared to serve the purpose of breathing. It had long, slender legs, and from its narrow shoulders hung four tentacular arms. These now gripped a small, glittering box from the front of which projected a cone-like snout. Its long, thin body was garbed in a tight-fitting coverall.

AT A DISTANCE of less than twelve feet, Norris and the creature faced each other. Norris snapped off his mind screen and sent out a mocking thought.

"Your detectors are hardly more efficient than your mind screen, Varranagh. The latter leaks. I knew you were coming long before you appeared."

The other's screen went off also.

"Grevellon!" The thought was vibrant with shock and dismay.

"At your service, my dear Varranagh."

"You traced me here?" Varranagh's questioning thought was incredulous and appalled.

"Aye, here," Norris—Grevellon, now—answered. "Across two-thousand light-years of space and through more than ten-thousand years of time. Here, Varranagh—and you shall not escape me again." Grevellon's thoughts became bitter and disgusted. "Oh, proud champion of Drur! Almost I wish our methods of warfare were like those of the natives of this planet. There would be satisfaction in their fierce clash of mighty armies, triumph from each foot of

enemy territory gained. But the Custodians do not permit that, and you, champion of Drur, will not fight me in honest battle."

Varranagh attempted to shield his thoughts naturally, but sullen undertones leaked through.

Grevellon lashed on, accusing and contemptuous. "You have done nothing but run, Varranagh. I managed finally to destroy your ship and isolate you in space—here, upon this world. Then, on our last encounter, I fused your chrono-naut and isolated you in time. But it took me four years before I at last discovered your Earthling identity as Edward Carter and traced you to Scott Center. You will not again slip through my fingers."

"The battle is not fair," Varranagh protested resentfully. "The knowledge of Jurvon has advanced beyond that of Drur. Under that condition I could not be expected to fight you fairly."

Grevellon's mental retort was sarcastic. "Not fair? Then why did you of Drur seek decision from the Custodians under the Rules of Political Differences?"

"We didn't know," Varranagh snapped sulkily.

"But it is too late. The Appeal for Decision has been made, and we have both been sworn in as champions of the opposing causes. We must obey the Rules of Combat, or Jurvon and Drur will once again be divided up into hundreds of little quarreling states, our political achievements set back a thousand years." Grevellon's thoughts became faintly pensive.

"But I believe I see the plan behind it. The Custodians are indeed very wise. Through the threat of division do they enforce the obeying of the Rules. Through the arming of

champions will they make our respective sciences reach their highest peaks of progress. And in union through the winning of decisions will they eventually bring about complete and final peace.

"No world would make the Appeal for Decision of the Custodians unless it was positive that its science had advanced beyond that of the opposition to the point where the armament of its champion was sure to bring victory. For to lose a decision means assimilation. If I lose in the combat, Jurvon becomes part of Drur, and must abide by the policies of Drur. If you lose, it is otherwise. The Custodians are very wise and enforce the Rules." Grevellon's mental voice became cold, hard, and deadly.

"Varranagh, Drur has made the Appeal and must obey the Rules. If you find the combat an unequal one, it is because the scientists of Drur have been rashly over-confident and have failed to arm you effectively. The policies of Drur have ever been wrong, and this can be no better example of its weaknesses. Now submit! Glorious Jurvon triumphs—and final peace comes at last to the System of Tardoll!"

Varranagh's answering thought was a mixture of sobbing rage.

"I refuse!"

ABRUPTLY, the Drurian's screen flicked off. Swift as a flash of light, he raised the box, and from the cone darted a beam of ravening, purple energy. The beam struck Grevellon's screen, splashed around it like a stream of water striking a brick wall. Then, though it still held, a dimple appeared in its glowing surface.

Varranagh's great amber orbs glittered vengefully. He concentrated

the direction of his beam upon the dimple, pushing it inward, ever inward, to the point where finally it would weaken and give.

Grevellon laughed softly and touched his belt. The luminous, white screen which surrounded him began to change. It lost its glow, turned grey, then became a sphere of utter black. And it radiated a cold, an infernal, horrible cold. The surfaces of the room suddenly became covered with frost.

Varranagh gasped and moved back, though he still held his beam upon the new screen. But it no longer splashed or pushed. It simply entered the black sphere and became lost, like a glowing violet rod poked into a patch of ebon shadow.

Ice was forming in the room, when abruptly Varranagh's beam paled and winked out. He released an involuntary thought of dismay and fright.

Grevellon laughed again. "Your weapon is exhausted, my dear Varranagh. My screen simply sucked all the energy from it. Now do you submit?"

Varranagh's answer was a curse. His screen snapped back on. He whirled, darted through the deserted kitchen and down into the cellar. The black sphere followed.

Within the cellar, Varranagh worked with frantic haste. His screen off again, he stood before a crude control panel, tentacles whipping about like frightened snakes. The pale, blue screen about the house abruptly flickered out and built once again within the cellar. It formed a tight shell about Varranagh and his machinery, but not actually touching the surfaces of the room. Grevellon halted before it, thinking swiftly. And then he caught an unrestrained snatch of thought.

"...time machine. Have to hurry. Screen won't hold against his field—"

Grevellon's response was mockery. The Drurians had indeed made a mistake in selecting this champion! Varranagh as yet apparently hadn't realized that he, Grevellon, had not only solved the secret of the blue destructive screen, but had actually gone through it in order to reach the house.

Grevellon touched his belt and the black sphere about him vanished. Again the pale, blue screen which he had used to gain admission into Clifton Manor formed around him. And then he was within Varranagh's protective shell, and the other whirled around in startled terror.

"Twice I offered you the chance to submit, Varranagh, but you refused each time," Grevellon flashed. "Now die, champion of Drur!"

AND BEFORE Varranagh's stunned mind could completely grasp the situation and act in defense, Grevellon's screen flicked off. His flashlight-like weapon swung up and its green radiance lashed out. Varranagh, caught squarely in its path, vanished while his tentacles were still in the act of darting to his belt.

It was over. The weary years of searching through space and time were at an end. Grevellon felt a kind of tired triumph. Now he could go home—home to glorious Jurvon. Jurvon—ruler of all Tardoll! The Custodians were very wise and enforced the decisions—

But first there were a few things to be done. Grevellon's gaze probed about the cellar, passed over the machines which Varranagh had built. One of them was a crude time travelling device. He decided that Varranagh's last thought had been about this.

These machines would have to be destroyed. Nothing of their alien presences must be left on this world...

Grevelton played his weapon over the machines. They vanished, one by one, until at last nothing was left but a number of holes in the floor and walls where his beam had played a moment too long.

Then Grevelton removed the instruments about his body. He reached up and pulled the black wig from his head. He peeled the artificial skin from his face along with the false nose and eye cups. He removed his clothes and the padding and braces

underneath them. He stretched. It was good to be free and unencumbered once more...

The green radiance flashed again, this time over the pile of articles on the cellar floor. Only another hole remained where they had rested. With them the identity of James Norris went forever.

Then, amber eyes gleaming, tiny, puckered mouth widened in a grin of eagerness, Grevelton's tentacles, once more strapped on pack and belt. His long, thin form, clad now in a tight-fitting coverall, trembled impatiently. He was going home...

THE END

MIGHTY MOUSE

By June Lurie

THE PASS called Jagistai in the Tarbagatal Mountains of Mongolia to this day seems possessed by a very demon of fury. The winds whistle and roar in mad anger, great blocks of snow plunge from the drifts above upon the heads of unfortunate travelers, and the voice of the howling gale seems to threaten imminent disaster.

Ancient legends have been kept alive in that region concerning evil demons which guard the pass, and the reason for their display of wrath upon travelers. It seems that very, very long ago some Chinese killed their king, or Khan, who was a grandson of that great ruler of antiquity, Jenghiz Khan himself. The wife and small son of the Khan escaped, and in the care of an old Lama or priest, rode or camelback out beyond, seeking safety.

But the Chinese discovered which way the fugitives had gone, and pursued them, on swift horses. When they nearly caught them, the Lama called down from Heaven a deep snow, through which the camels could travel, while the horses were delayed. Just before reaching this pass, the old Lama suddenly fell from his saddle, dead. At the same time, the weeping widow saw the Chinese riders proceeding across the valley below, heading towards the pass.

In desperation, clutching her child to her, she urged her tired camel onward, though she knew nothing of driving the creatures.

Her pursuers saw her, and she heard their shouts of joy as they felt within their grasp the prize of the heir to the throne. Mother and son would be decapitated, and their heads exposed to mockery and insults.

Terrified, the mother prayed to the "Earth and Gods of Mongolia", that the flesh of Jenghiz Khan be not allowed to perish. And then, a small white mouse jumped upon her knee from a nearby rock. "I am here to help you," it said. "Proceed calmly, and without fear. Your son is destined to a life of glory, and your pursuers will perish."

That a mouse could speak, and with such a message of hope, when death seemed certain at any moment, was more than the poor woman could believe. Doubt showed in her face. The mouse jumped down, and spoke once more:

"I am Jagistai, the spirit of Tarbagatai. The Gods have given me great might and authority. You will be saved, but because you hesitated to believe your answer from the Gods, this pass of Jagistai will henceforth be dangerous for both good and bad."

And so it was. The son and the widow of the Khan were saved, but Jagistai became merciless. Anyone who journeys through that pass must be on constant guard, for the demon of the mountain is always striving to lead travelers to destruction.

MAP OF MATH

By Carter T. Wainwright

THERE IS a branch of mathematics known as topology or Analysis Situs, which is concerned with certain common but unthought of properties of objects. Thus, topology is interested in left-handedness, gloves, doughnut shaped things, the famous Mobius Strip, the properties of warped and distorted shapes in general. It has been called "rubber-sheet geometry" which describes it excellently because it is concerned with the essential properties of geometric figures which remain no matter what distortion overtakes the object other than tearing.

One of the problems best known to the science tells about a unique "hypothesis" which has long bothered mathematicians. Have you ever wondered about the coloring of a map? A theorem advanced by one mathematician, a student of topology says that, in coloring a map of the usual kind made of countries and boundaries, only four colors are necessary to completely isolate each country!

Think about that for a moment. No matter how complex the map nor how simple it may be, it may be colored with four colors or less—no more, at least—so that no two bordering countries bear the same color and that each is distinct and isolated.

This interesting and apparently useless theorem had been the subject of much speculation by mathematicians. For one thing, intuitively, as one studies it, it becomes apparently true. Furthermore, practical, actual tests show this to be the case. In fact, anyone can show it to himself. Just take a map of the complexity you wish and try out the idea. Invariably, no matter how many countries are involved, it will always work out so that no more than four colors are necessary to make the map work.

Now, though this is known to be a fact, it requires a proof. And for many years mathematicians have been laboring to prove this theorem, without success. Time and time again so-called proofs have been shown to be in error.

Recently, however, the Yearbook of the Encyclopedia Britannica announced in its mathematics section that such a proof had been invented by a German mathematician during the war. It is probably available now to mathematicians in other countries. Thus another hard mathematical nut has been cracked and the sweetmeat exposed to our ravenous mental teeth. If only someone will solve Fermat's theorem, we'll be all set.

CELEBES BUFFALO

By J. R. Marks

WHEN MOST of us hear the word buffalo we immediately think of the American beasts that roamed the plains of our western states. However, the scientific fact is that the buffalo has not been an exclusive product of the United States.

Take the Anoa, for an example. This beast is a wild buffalo that roams the Celebes Island. It is the smallest of the wild buffalo family. Its own trademark is its horns, which unlike most other members of the buffalo family, are straight and upright. It's closest relatives are the Asiatic buffalo, while its habits are most closely allied to those of the Indian buffalo.

Many legends are built around wild beasts by the natives. It has been rumored that on Celebes Island some natives consider the Anoa as a sacred animal, and that to harm it is to anger the Gods. True or not, the fact remains that primitive religious rites surround beasts of this type, rites which our western civilization has thus far been unable to shake from the minds of the natives.

ANNOINTING CEREMONY

By L. A. Burt

IN PRACTICALLY all religions, from the most primitive, to the most modern, the symbolism of anointing has been carried through the centuries.

In its basic form, it is a ceremony whereby, with the rubbing of various fats, oils, or the like, the person thus anointed is considered free from all forms of contamination and influences.

In Australia, for example, it has long been felt by the natives, that a person, anointed with the eul-fat of a dead person would thereby assume all of the virtues of that person. On the other side of the world, the Arabs, when about to go into battle, or when they are to perform a specific deed requiring great courage, rub themselves with the fat of a lion, the beast they consider to be the exemplification of strength and courage.

Even in present day Christian religions, oils are used for anointing individuals of the faith. In some obscure faiths it is believed that anointing a corpse will drive away vampires, or ghouls that may possibly inhabit the bodies after death.



SIGNAL POINT IN SPACE

by CHARLES RECOUR

The satellites served faithfully as signal points in space, guiding ships to a safe landing. Then one day the station on Phoebe was silent . . .

"The success of the commercial, industrial and economic exploitation of the entire Solar System is due, in no small measure, to the superb communications systems that were in existence even at that time. The men who manned those stations were persons of magnificent courage."

Lenner's HISTORY

DON MANNING manipulated the screw driver carefully and the contacts of the little relay closed quickly and silently. He straightened up from the bench over which he was leaning and breathed a sigh of relief. "These things were supposed to be foolproof," he said cynically. "About as foolproof as my

The twin towers of the signal station sent out their pulsing waves of energy, straight toward the ringed planet in the distance . . .



grandmother's clock!"

It was the work of a very few minutes to replace the relay in position, connect its contacts, and put it into operation. Don glanced out the port and even though the visibility was extremely bad he could see the heated paraboloid once again begin to rotate smoothly and effortlessly. Breathing easier, he sat down at the small table that served as workbench and desk and dining-room, and poured himself a fresh cup of coffee. He lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply, took a sip of the coffee and then leaned back with the satisfied air of a man who has just done a good job and knows it.

His eyes wandered again to the port. Through it, vaguely and tenuously he could see the rotating antenna. He felt strangely akin to it. In its majestic rotation, in its immutable spinning, he saw himself mirrored.

It seemed to symbolize him and his work. Like it, he was condemned—he smiled at his mind's use of the word "condemned"—to perform his monotonous task ceaselessly and faithfully. It was hard for him to imagine he was important or that anything depended upon him.

SIX MONTHS ago he had graduated in theoretical physics back on Earth. But his intense interest in the subject demanded that he do graduate work. Unfortunately as in all things, money was a prime requisite. So he decided to postpone further work in school for a while. Then he started to look for a job. A friend of his called his attention to a number of Government positions that were open for men with a good background in Electronic Engineering. He had investigated the matter and found that technicians were needed to man the Navigational Signal Points.

Don had jumped at the chance. The pay was extremely good, as befitted the job which was monotonous, unglamorous—and dangerous. In a short while he was aboard a space ship of the Patrol bound for Phoebe, the outermost satellite of Saturn. Here he would be stationed for a year or more, with no company save the radio contacts he made in the course of duty. It was the function of these Signal Points to provide radio beams for the orientation of space craft. His job was to keep the station operating at all times, sending out its pulses of electromagnetic radiation much as the earlier lighthouses on Earth sent out their beams.

It required a skilled man, one familiar with radio equipment, to maintain these Signal Points. Don fitted the picture perfectly. There were some disadvantages to this lonely post on Phoebe though.

Those Signal Points on satellites and asteroids of the inner planets were very busy continually making radio contacts with the great mass of transport vessels that traveled between Earth, Mars and Venus.

The outposts on the Outer Planets, however were another matter. They were truly lonely and isolated. Travel was rare. The Outer Planets were uninhabited and almost uninhabitable—so far as the few exploring parties had discovered. Yet, Signal Points had to be maintained for the use of these infrequent visitors and also for the exploration craft that occasionally made the long trip.

Through the ring of heated quartzite ports, Don could now see his antennae performing their silent duty of sending out pulses of radiation. The Signal Point vibrated very slightly to the humming of the powerful electrical generators beneath his feet, driven by their miniscule

atomic power plants.

Night and day made no sense on this timeless world. Don glanced at the clock which regulated his living. Time for inspection, he thought. I'll give the stand-by generator another shot of lubricant, just in case.

Suddenly the red light above the monitor-receiver flashed. Don stepped over to the scanning radar and punched the button. Overhead he could visualize the paraboloid that was the antenna oscillating in its peculiar pattern as it scanned the cone of space overhead. Hunched over the console, Don watched the twenty-inch screen carefully. Then it appeared. A tiny pin-point of light in one corner of the screen. He knew it was moving rapidly but that it was so remote it only appeared to be quiescent.

He glanced over to the wall to see if the monitor-receiver was on. It was but the speaker remained silent. He picked up a microphone and spoke into it.

"This is Signal Point One—Phoebe. This is Signal Point One—Phoebe. I have picked you up on my radar screen. Please acknowledge. Please acknowledge contact."

EXPECTANTLY Don awaited an answer. Regardless of the frequency used by the strange vessel, his receiver would sweep it up. A minute passed. Then five—then ten. Still no answer. Don was puzzled. It was a rigid requirement that any vessel answer a Signal Point's call. This stranger chose not to. Or perhaps something was wrong.

He set a tape on the transmitter sending out the calls. He knew that the strange ship should have first contacted him on the pulse beam without waiting for him to pick up the craft personally. He noted the

contact in the log, checked to make sure his transmitter was working, and then resumed his inspection.

A half-hour later when he reappeared in the control room he saw that still no answer had been received. Now the strange ship was nearer. Why the radio silence, he asked himself? It didn't make sense.

It was the first unusual incident Don had encountered in his six-months of service. Previously the few contacts he had made had responded instantly and had asked for locations or other information. But he had been well briefed on operating procedure. He put the information on a beam and radiated it into space as regulations demanded. If any patrol craft was in the vicinity—which was unlikely—they would pick it up and relay it in a series of jumps back to Earth.

Don ignored the ship on the radar screen and the silence of the receiver, although periodically he couldn't refrain from glancing at it.

Another day passed. Now the ship loomed on the screen. From its outlines, Don could classify it. It was a very small ship little larger than a lifeboat, which could account for a damaged transmitter.

Turning up the amplification of the video pick-up, Don could see that the small ship appeared to have undergone some drastic accident for its outer hull was blackened and burnt and the skin appeared twisted in spots.

By plotting its course it was clear that the craft was heading straight toward Phoebe. Although he remained conscious of the ship through the rest of the time, Don continued his routine duties.

The next time he looked at the screen, the little blob of light was gone. He made a last effort to con-

tact it but realized that it was a futile gesture. The ship had undoubtedly passed into the radio shadow of the satellite. Don shrugged his shoulders. He had done all that was required of him. But there was a gnawing little voice in the back of his mind which still expressed curiosity about the whole affair.

THAT NIGHT he awoke with a start. He sat up in his bed, listening. The alarm was ringing. The monitor must have latched onto a signal. He raced toward the communications room. A red light glowed over the sensitive receiver and the buzzer rang intermittently.

Don turned up the gain of the receiver. Faintly through the sputtering and crackling he detected the standard emergency distress signal. It was faint and weak as if coming from a great distance. The directional antenna outside swung and oscillated as it waveringly sought out the line of maximum intensity.

Don's eyebrows lifted. There was nothing on the radar screen and the directional antenna indicated that the signal was coming from a point that couldn't be far off! Then it flashed into his mind. The ship had landed or crashed on Phoebe and probably wasn't more than a matter of miles away from the Signal Point! This was undoubtedly an emergency transmitter operating, which would account for its feebleness in the ammonia laden atmosphere of Phoebe.

Don dressed rapidly, slipped into a space suit, a metal-fabric monstrosity, and went over to the emergency airlock. The little ship resting inside was a standard lifeboat, an ovoid of steel twelve feet long with an unbroken surface save for the quartzite porta for observation, and the directional antennas of its radio equip-

ment.

Don closed the inner door of the airlock. He had no fear for the station—its equipment was fully automatic and would operate indefinitely unless some major breakdown should occur. And he'd be back long before then. He stepped into the little space boat, pressed the button that sent a pulse into the electrical outer door and as it swung open, he fed a little power into the jets. It slithered out into the mad maelstrom of ammonia-methane wind and was borne away like a chip on a stream.

Skillfully Don manipulated the controls and brought the little vessel into some semblance of order. Visually, he was blind. It was impossible to peer through the white madness outside. The station vanished, existing for him no longer except as a little lightblob on the radar screen.

He set the receiver for the distress frequency he had picked up and was rewarded by the metallic tone coming in feebly. After half a dozen false starts he managed to orient the beam. Slowly then the signal increased in intensity.

In the blinding storm it was impossible for him to see anything and his navigation had to be done completely from instruments. If his antennas had not been electrically heated they would have long since been so encrusted with frozen ammonia that they would have been useless.

Automatically Don's transmitters were answering the distress call but from the fact that it didn't change, he concluded that either there was no transmitter on that end that could be modulated by voice or tone, or that the victims didn't know how to operate one.

AFTER TWENTY minutes of creeping through the poisonous

atmosphere of frigidity, the distress signal was so strong, Don knew that he was almost directly over the craft. He turned on the video-scanner but saw nothing but blizzard. Now it was a matter of descending very slowly until something became visible.

Soon he felt the gentle bump. The spaceboat was down. The video screen was a distorted hash of interference but Don could see the bulky object alongside which his little ship was laying. He wriggled through the air lock, and with one hand touching the side of the wrecked space-ship he guided himself around it. It was not a large vessel, and it had been attacked by something for its surface was badly dented and corroded. He found the air lock.

Using a hand gun he pounded on the side of the air lock. Its controls swung it open as someone inside pushed a button. Don stepped through. The door swung shut. He spoke into his suit microphone.

"Don't open the inner lock," he said, "until the frozen ammonia has evaporated from my suit."

"All right," a voice crackled in his earphones, "say the word."

Don waited a few minutes until he was clean. "Blow it free," he said, and a blast of air in answer to his command swept through the lock clearing it of the poisonous vapors. The inner lock opened up and Don entered the control room of the wrecked space ship.

He found himself facing a suited figure in whose hands a rifle was held.

The stubby weapon with the huge magazine was pointed directly at his middle. Through the helmet slit and behind the quartzite lenses Don found himself staring into a pair of clod blue eyes. In back of the standing figure lay another suited body,

inert and evidently injured for it did not move.

"Wait a minute," Don protested, "put down that blaster. I'm Don Manning from the Signal Point. I'm here to lend a hand."

The muzzle of the rifle sank. Don reached up and wrenched off his helmet. The suited figure put down the weapon and did the same.

Don's eyes widened as a shock of golden-yellow hair tumbled down around the figure's shoulders.

"I'm sorry," the girl said apologetically, "I'm Barbara Ross. I thought you were Black or Jetson or one of their boys. I caught your signals, but I couldn't reply. The radio equipment was knocked out. When I hit here I managed to throw a single tube oscillator together."

"That's why your signal was so weak—it's a miracle it got through this atmosphere."

"It's a miracle we—I—got here at all," the girl agreed soberly. "I know very little about navigation—especially under fire. That reminds me, I'd like to get out of here—but fast—before they find me. Can we leave now?"

"Certainly," Don agreed, "hut what about him?" He pointed to the prostrate figure.

"He's dead." She said simply, but her eyes blinked rapidly as if to keep from crying. "My uncle, Dr. William Ross—oh, we were such fools," she cried, bitterly, "we shouldn't have done this ourselves."

Don looked at her mystified.

"I'll explain it all as soon as we get out of here," the girl said. She put on her helmet, picked up a small box and went to the air lock. Don followed her, tightening his helmet as he went. He stopped, turned and walked over to the prone figure. When he got close to it, he could see

the ragged rent in the helmet where something powerful had sheered it off along with a portion of the skull.

In a few minutes the two of them were in Don's space boat. As Don took over the controls and started back toward the Signal Point, the girl began speaking.

"I can appreciate your confusion," she began, "so I'll try to give you the story. It's a simple one too. Dr. Ross was a mineralogist. He suspected that from a geological study of the conditions on Iapetus, Iapetan diamonds would be found. He fitted out the ship you saw back there and I went with him. I wanted adventure—" she smiled wryly, "—and I got it. We found the stones all right." She opened the small box Don had seen her take with her. He peered into it. In it, thrown together like pebbles, was a collection of brilliant and flashing diamonds. He whistled.

"But," she continued, "at the Iapetan base, Uncle William talked too much. Black and Jetson, so-called salvage men—found out about the collection. They tried to capture us, but we got away in time. They followed us and cut us up pretty badly. You saw what the Gloaming looked like. Then Uncle William was killed by a chance shot. I managed to outrun them and I headed for the nearest beam—which happened to be yours. My radio equipment was destroyed and even before it was wrecked Uncle William and I were unable to raise any patrol ships. You know the rest. I practically crashed here."

Don told her about himself then, and as he talked, his hands automatically manipulated the controls that held the space boat on a straight course through the blinding frozen ammonia wind.

Suddenly his narrative stopped. For simultaneously the beam went

out. An instant later it cut in again and Don knew that the emergency sender had taken over. Quickly he fed power to the space boat. But even as he caught a glimpse of the Station in the remote distance, the beam went dead. The girl had been following his actions closely. She understood what had happened. Don turned to her. "Your friends, right?"

She nodded. "It must be them. They homed on your beam too. They've taken over the Signal Point!"

"Of course," Don agreed, "That's exactly what they've done. They must have cut the switches accidentally. They certainly wouldn't want us to know that they made it. But it's too late now. We know where they are, at least and that's a lot of help."

"Is it?" Barbara demurred, "we can't do much with this little space boat, and we don't have any heavy weapons and there are at least three of them—maybe four."

"Before we start worrying," Don said purposefully, "let's get within range of the station." The space boat bucked its way toward the station. Don had no fear of detection. He knew how poor visibility was from the observation platform of the Signal Point.

He set down the little space ship about three hundred feet from the Signal Point well out of visual range even if the wind should sweep aside the storm momentarily.

"We'll leave the Iapetan diamonds here and take nothing with us except the weapons. I'll take your rifle. You take the pistol."

They traded weapons and after checking them and their space-suits, they squirmed through the little air lock into the Phoebean blizzard.

CAUTIOUSLY they found their way to the Signal Station. Don

saw the dim outlines of a fairly large space ship on the opposite side. He felt the girl tap his shoulder. He looked to where she was pointing and he could see clearly the cause of the peculiar behavior of the radio apparatus a short while ago. In landing, the raiders had swooped so low that the exposed antennae were clipped from their positions.

Don proceeded to walk around the building to the air lock that led directly into the power house. He manipulated the combination lock and the door swung open. Barbara stepped in after him. The door closed.

Don flipped the light switch on the opposite side of the wall, located the other entry door. He and the girl waited a few minutes until the ammonia-ice melted from them. Don pressed the lever that cleared the lock with a blast of air. Now they were ready to enter the Signal Point proper without danger of giving warning by allowing ammonia fumes to contaminate the air.

They went through the inner door and up the stairway which led to the control room.

He and the girl looked through the little glass window in the door opening on the radio room. They could see three men sitting at ease, talking animatedly among themselves. They seemed to be debating what to do. Quickly Don flipped open the door and stepped through. His eye-port was open and he could be heard.

"Stand up!" he commanded brusquely.

"Up!" Don repeated and the loosely held rifle in his hand emphasized his command. The three men stood up. There was startled anger on their faces.

Barbara had removed her helmet and was standing beside him. Don took off his. None of the three said

anything. They simply stood and glared.

"Back over to that wall," Don gestured.

By now the leader of the three had recovered his aplomb. He was smiling at Don.

"Listen to me," he said. "You won't have to worry about a thing if you'll make a sensible proposition. Now I—"

Don never knew what the proposition was. He felt something hard in his back and a cold calculating voice said calmly:

"Put down your gun."

Don glanced at Barbara. Her face was white. She was staring at the man behind Don. The three men against the wall grinned and started to come forward.

DON LET his weapon clatter to the floor. The calmness that had been Barbara's was gone. He could almost see her mind estimating the possibility of shooting down his assailant. She would succeed of course, but he, Don Manning, would die.

Resigned, Barbara dropped her gun.

The three men recovered their own weapons.

"That's better, a lot better," Black said as he straightened up. "Now we can talk like real friends. And we've got a lot to talk about. So let's start now."

"Leave her—" Don started to say.

"—Sbup up!" Black said abruptly. "We want to do our talking to the girl."

He stepped over to her. "Listen," he said, "we can make everything pleasant for all of us. All we want is that packet of Iapetan diamonds. Nothing else. Produce them and we'll let you go."

"And suppose I won't tell you where they are?" Barbara asked quietly.

Black's hand lashed out and slapped her hard across the cheek. The girl stepped back, and Black struck her twice more. She flinched under the blows but remained silent.

The four men were so interested in the girl and her refusal to talk that their eyes were not on Don. A half dozen feet away was the girl's pistol. Don knew that in a desperate effort he could reach it. But what was more important was the fact that their helmets were also lying on the floor. Barbara's was practically at her feet, while his lay only a step away.

Black was reasoning with her now.

"Be sensible," he was saying. "You want to live, don't you? All you have to do is tell us where you've put the jewels and we'll even take you back to Earth. If you don't talk we'll hunt around until we find them. And we will find them, you know that. So why don't you make it easier all the way around. You're young and you're beautiful. Why not stay alive?"

While the monologue went on, Don managed to catch her eye. Almost imperceptibly he nodded toward the space helmet on the floor. Then he glanced toward the quartzite ports along the wall. He had no idea if his meaning was being conveyed, but it was their only chance. They had to move fast.

Carefully Don estimated the distance and the time involved in his little scheme. He lunged forward and shouted at the top of his lungs: "Your helmet! Your helmet!"

Instantly he had scooped, up his own and flipped it on his head. In the same breath, his right hand snatched the pistol from the floor. Even as he was bringing it up, the four men were almost on him. With

a desperate effort, Don fired twice. Straight and true his bullets sped, smashing into the quartzite window ten feet away. The hard glass, tough and durable, shattered under the impact of the bullet. With a whish the ammonia and methane atmosphere flooded into the room.

Don's helmet was almost tight, but his nostrils caught the barest scent of the deadly gases.

Instantly the four men were down. There was no time for thought—it happened so fast. Don saw the men writhe briefly as the chemicals enveloped them. He saw the corrosive gases lick their flesh and in a matter of seconds they were dead, their flesh already beginning to assume the mottled hues of chemical decomposition.

Don raced to Barbara. Her helmet was safe on her head and she like he, was blowing the helmet free of any taint of noxiousness with the little increased pressure from her oxygen generator. But the sight of the men on the floor was too much for her. He could see her swaying on her feet. Then she fainted...

FOUR HOURS later, they were sitting opposite each other in the little room. Don had replaced the broken port, removed the bodies to the power room, and blown the place clean of the gases. They had left their trace though in all the corroded material of the apparatus.

"Well," Don said, "you're free now to take their ship and leave the Signal Station. You can probably pick up some sort of a patrol ship soon enough. I've got a lot of work to do now. I thought this was going to be a monotonous job. My hands will be full trying to get Signal Station One operating again."

"Yes," Barbara said, "I can see

that. And I was the cause of it all. If I hadn't plunked my ship down right here, you wouldn't have a thing to worry about—not to mention my life." She was smiling, but there was sincerity in her voice, "I'm grateful," she said, "very grateful—and the least I can do is give you a hand here. Would you mind having my help you? I don't want to go into space alone again."

Don looked at her steadily and for a long while before he answered. His eyes gazed strongly into hers. "No," he said, after a time, "I'd like having you here to help me."

"I'll try," Barbara said simply. She reached across the table and touched his hand. There was great promise in her eyes and voice.

THE END

ANTICYCLONIC CLIMATE

by Sandy Miller

SIR FRANCIS Galton, in the year 1861 devised the term, anticyclone. He introduced it on weather maps to denote areas just the reverse of cyclones in weather effect.

In the practical application, cyclone areas are those where the winds circulate in a counterclockwise manner in the northern hemisphere, and a clockwise sense in the southern hemisphere. The anticyclonic circulation is just the reverse, clockwise in the northern hemisphere, and counterclockwise in the southern.

If you inhabit an anticyclonic area you can expect fine weather and mild winds.

However, these areas do not always mean stability of climate. Common results of anticyclonic areas are the well known monsoons of Asiatic origin. These may be very hot, dry winds in the summer, and very wet winds in the winter.

Some chambers of commerce appear to have adopted phrases of Sir Francis Galton's weather descriptiveness. In some localities of the United States we are lead to believe that rain is nothing more than a slightly "wet" wind. However that may be, you still need an umbrella if you're caught in one of those "damp" breezes!

* * *

"BABBITT" METAL

By H. R. Stanton

WE ARE all acquainted with the common bearing in our everyday life. However, few of us realize that this boon to our mechanical age was not arrived at so simply or easily.

As most of us know a bearing, it is a small ball of metal riding between two moving parts, protected from excessive wear and operating more efficiently with a constant film of flowing oil on its surface. Looking at it thus it might be simple to assume that the metal involved is not important, that it is the film of oil which is the main factor.

Such however, is not the case. The metal is the important thing to be considered, for it is the metal that must meet the friction test, that is, the low coefficient of friction.

In early days lead was used commonly as a bearing metal, but it was proven to be too soft in itself. It was discovered that alloys of various other metals with lead

produced a more ideal metal for bearing use. This brings us to the famous name of Babbitt. For it was Isaac Babbitt who introduced the alloy metal composed of 83 per cent tin, 11 per cent antimony, and 6 per cent copper. This alloy proved to be so superior to anything else known for the purpose it was intended, that thereafter the alloy was was known as "Babbitt metal." Today we use this name as a common part of our everyday vocabulary, especially when we take our automobiles to a garage for a bearing overhaul. How often have you heard a mechanic use the word "Babbitt"? How often have you used it yourself? It seems so simple to us, and yet, before the time of Isaac Babbitt, surmounting the problem of durable metal for bearing use seemed impossible. We owe much to this ingenious man who helped make our automotive age possible.

The CYCLOPEANS

By RICHARD S. SHAVER

Did a great race of Cyclopean people roam the Earth's surface in the distant past? And if so, what terrible catastrophe destroyed them? . . .



Gerd squatted by the fire, slowly cooking the deer he had slain for his meal. And his single great eye watched the savory flesh, while his every sense was also alert for a possible sign of alien danger.

FOREWORD

LONG AGO, before the numerous catastrophes made earth the place of dull and repetitious nonsense that it is, a race lived here who were known among themselves as the Cyclopeans.

Today the word means "gigantic," to us. Then, it meant nothing of the kind, for, though they were giants twenty feet and more in height, their height was normal to them.

They were known as Cyclopeans in space because they were a race who followed a cycle, and the Cycle meant the focus of certain tides of force flowing through space. This vorticial "cycle" was a place in space particularly favorable to life and growth. It was this concentration of many bene-

ficial currents in one great whirl that moved through space and their following of this whirlpool of beneficence that made them giants, made them vital and intensely alive, and that gave them their name of Cyclopean.

It is true there are remnants of their building still extant on earth. These ruins are called "The Cyclopean Ruins," but it is "unknown" today who built them or even the origin of the word itself. The first Greek temples were erected upon a base of gigantic blocks which were already in place, were the floors of titanic towers long since swept away by the tidal floods that swept over all earth once, miles high. No Greek ever laid these foundations. Some of the



stones weigh hundreds of tons.

But it is underneath the earth that their greatest works remain, secret still today to the public, but known to many who profit from the treasures there.

However it is not about these caverns that we write, but about the life on earth when it was a vast forest playground.

In those days the Mississippi was called the Muisasipi, and the vast forested plains and delta region were called the Muisiana. When the French came, it was simple to remove the M and replace it with an L, so we have Louisiana, but somehow they didn't get the letter changed in the Mississippi. They just misspelled it.

The trees were more gigantic than words can tell. We have the petrified stump of Devil's Tower to tell us how big they were, but of course "science" has to argue that it is a volcanic "plug." There are many of these so-called "basaltic plugs" in France, and many a medieval castle sits on what was once a tree stump.

Animals, too, under the influence of the beneficial flows of energy from space, called by the Cyclopeans "the Cycle", grew giganticly. So did the Cyclopeans, and when the great whirlpool of raw life force moved on through space, they followed it, and earth began its long decline which leaves us where we are today, small and unimportant ants upon a forgotten world.

But fragments of their sojourn remain here. Those fragments tell us a great deal. The native of the great forests of earth was somewhat like a Mayan of ancient Yucatan, except that he was a giant, a cultured giant of a long, long period of titanic growth. He wore a sarong, and spent much time drifting along the peaceful streams of Muisiana, playing on

his giant stringed instrument and singing songs of a beauty only faintly echoed today by the plaintive sadness of Hawaiian native music. He camped out in a transparent plastic "teepee", the product of a factory catering to the sports trade. When his vacation was over, he went back to work in the caverns beneath the earth—but he did not work very hard, for they possessed a machine art such as we moderns cannot even imagine.

From all space the great pleasure ships came, bringing people to enjoy the titanic beauty of the giant forests of earth—the whole planet was a Titan's playground, and every stream contained its great brilliant canoes, its swimmers sporting in the water, every grassy bank its quota of "woo" dancers, its love-making and singing and stim-indulgence.

The history of this mighty people is beyond recall, we know they existed, terrifically and giganticly and intensely lived—in way of delight beyond our comprehension.

This story is very little to the point of depicting these people and their ways, because to do so would make a kind of thing requiring much study to understand, containing words such as "soda-dancer", "intramen" (meaning the caverns entrance containing the beginning of a tram (-train)- in to the cities beneath) etc. which would mean nothing to you without study.

To picture for you the backs and loins and well-filled heads of a giant race whose muscles were hardened by centuries of loving toil each for the other, and all for one—their old est, wisest, best-loved woman—that is beyond a modern story teller. Their rule of love comes down to us only in mealy phrases, or again in such occasionally intelligent books as *Pilgrims Progress*.

But only with the ancient, deep, heart-dredging phrases of the Cyclopean's language can their story be told. We do not have the symbols to hold the flow of their meaning.

So I give you an adventure story entitled "The Cyclopeans" merely to remind you—they once existed!

JAK WAS a gigantic dog. When Gard Callan was at a loss, as he often was here in earth's tremendous forests, Jak obligingly furnished him the information he needed.

Gard wondered what was keeping his four-legged companion and adviser. He felt like an orphan without him around. He could never quite get used to the trees here on this planet called Tellus, called Terra, called Mu...

The earth had several other names, depending on what part of space your language came from, but Gard didn't worry about the name of the place. But the trees!

For one raised on a frigid planet, used only to plants confined to the cavern hotbeds, for a mere plant to soar three thousand feet in the air, with a base as big as a city block at home—was pure presumption!

It was small wonder the various peoples of the Cyclope Federation came to Tellus to vacation. Nowhere else was nature so prodigal with beauty, with grandeur, with pleasant streams and park-like primeval forests, untouched by any but the Forest Guards' protective hands.

Which had proved lucky for him, for the flow of tourists and vacationers ever increased, creating demand for able men as guides and guards. It was the only place a man discharged from the Mentatech Corps would have been accepted without embarrassing questions.

You didn't have to have a perfect record to land a job as Forest Guide. His particular training as a Mentatech plus his native telepathic aptitude made landing the job a cinch. He had picked from the mind of the examiner exactly those answers he needed to fill out his questionnaire.

And on the job, there was Jak. Jak had been raised here in these forests, and what he didn't know about them just wasn't known. Jak was a mental marvel himself.

Gard Callan was a little hazy as to just what breed of dog Jak might be. Among a race who very generally experimented with improving nature by transposing genes in the ovum, by growth-raying the mind of the baby during infancy, Jak was not exactly unique in his powers of thought. But he was a perfect example of someone's loving care in raising the intelligent animals upon which most Cyclopeans lavished their affection.

Wolfhound, maybe, the original stock, or Irish deerhound. Big and rangy, he stood a good six-foot at the shoulders. But beside Gard Callan's fifteen youthful feet of height he did not seem large. Callan himself was small, compared to the adult height of twenty feet among the Cyclopes. But since it took centuries to attain such size, there were many others shorter than Callan.

GARD WAS squatting by the cook fire, turning the saddle of venison over the coals. These Tellurian deer were small. For a man of his size, a half a deer was not much of a meal. And Jak could easily consume the other half, preferably raw.

Jak could place his forepaws on Gard's shoulders, bringing his head up to the twelve foot mark, if anyone had measured. But usually there was only Gard and the dog to while away

the long hours between patrols. Regular patrol was necessary to keep the big killer cats and the wolves out of the regular tourist trails vicinity.

Jak was usually, when not working, stretched out in front of the big transparent teepee, guarding Callan's meagre belongings. Jax was meditating at such times Analyzing the ways of man. Puzzling about what was going to become of them if they kept on with their everlasting play.

Which was not strange, for little serious work was ever done by the Cyclopes whom Jak met in his duties. They came to Tellus to relax, and not to labor with their hands or rack their brains with more study.

Most of them had had enough of that sort of thing in their homes, striving as they all did to overcome the growing threat of the Outlaw League. The League might engulf all their precious structure of freedom beneath the weight of its growing Imperialism.

Gard snorted. "Piratism" was a better word.

He glanced up the trail, a long tunnel of darkness under the fantastic intertwining of gigantic limbs and endless foliage. Something or someone was coming!

Gard sent his peculiarly sensitive mind questing after the source of the sensing that had come to him. He leaped to his feet, for a wounded creature, just out of sight, was racing toward him, with a soundless plea for help in its mind.

No! Not Jak! Not his only true friend on this planet of his exile. Not his true-hearted, big-thinking Jak!

The beautiful hound came bounding on three legs, chest having maddly. He fell across Callan's feet, lay twitching in what Gard feared was a death throes.

His whole shoulder and great

muscled foreleg were burnt half away by a fission beam! Who was using the illegal weapon in these peaceful forests?

Gard's great eye darkened from sunny blue to steel dun. Burning fury that anyone could be so ruthless, so cold as to kill an animal as clever and well-meaning as Jak mounted through Callan in a growing red haze.

Gard bent over the dying animal, that had been closer friend than ever human had, their minds in close communion in the mental silence of the quiet forests for so long.

He quested through the tortured paths of Jak's peculiar vivid thought, searching for some clue there to who had done this thing.

Within the faithful dog's mind, thought struggled with the gathering mists of death. Jak had been hurrying home to camp to tell Gard that a ship had landed outside the legal landing areas, endangering the forest with fire, perhaps hunting the rarer animals for skins. Such a landing was the particular crime which Gard and Jak were there to prevent, for no one touched foot to Tellus' forests except with official guidance supervising. They were too valuable, were the thing that brought most of Tellus' trade and visitors.

Jak saw a man. A good looking man. Gard saw the picture of the fellow in Jak's mind, a little blurred by the speed with which the wolfhound had been running. The dog slowed, spoke to the man. Jak was always interested in man. It was his avocation, analyzing the master race and wondering just what they meant to his own all-over concept of life and deity and fate. The man had smiled, spoken pleasantly, and as Jak slowed down to pass the time of day, had jerked out his fission blaster and put a beam into him. Only his sudden

leap had delayed his death. As the dog completed his picturization of the drama and the crime of his death, done starkly without his usual wealth of mental-picture detail to enliven the account he twitched his legs, and gasped out his last breath.

Tears of sorrow, tears of blinding rage, trickled down Gard's broad tanned cheeks. Still weeping, with great sobs checked painfully in his throat, he buckled on his own fission gun and set out. Running, his great strides bounding his giant body along the trail in fifteen foot leaps, he followed the dog's scent on the trail.

* * *

IT WAS only a short time; he had hardly begun to get his running breath, when a sharp scream from ahead made his limbs pump faster. A young scream, a woman's scream!

Every instinct from his Titan ancestry acted within his great body to fit his muscles for what those instincts told him was coming. If that man was a guide, as his possession of a fission gun indicated, he had conducted his last innocent female on a trip in these forests.

Speeding along, the boughs whipping his face as he cut the corner of the curving trail, he saw ahead a waiting *skimmer* floating on its gravity-warp field in the center of the trail.

Beyond the floating skimmer, some two hundred feet away, was the tall figure in the same native Muisian costume that the killer of Jak had worn in the mental pictures in the dog's mind—short sarong of vivid figured Tong silk and dyed eagle feathers tied in his hair. The weapon belt and fission gun about his waist looked incongruous with the peaceful play costume, and Gard leaped even faster toward him, for in his arms a woman's figure struggled!

He was big, nearly as Gard himself, and there was something familiar about the heavy square shoulders and short thick neck, the round skull set solidly, the dark hair and heavily tanned skin. As the man lifted his head to assure himself he was unobserved in his abduction, Gard cursed. Kurn Lekro, the man who had made a hermit of him! Kurn, who had gotten him fired from the best post a man ever fell into! Kurn, whose lies had set up the frame which had gotten him discharged.

Gard crouched down behind the floating skimmer. He tugged out his gun, but waited. He wanted to know what Kurn was up to, and the girl might make him talk. He might boast to her. He would wait a few seconds and see.

For the girl was half screaming at her captor, and he was rumbling mocking answers back at her distraught face. Besides, he couldn't fire while Kurn held the girl, he must wait till chance separated the two figures for an instant. On came the big burly masquerader, and in Gard's heart the old bate and frustration boiled up stronger than ever. Now Kurn had killed his dog, after the other injuries he had suffered from him. There was going to be no mercy in this arrest.

HE TURNED the little gnarled knob on the handle of the deadly fission chamber, from the aperture of which would now emerge a beam the slightest touch of which would cause a lingering agonizing death, and a center hit, instant annihilation. Left in the safety position, the gun emitted a ray which caused unconsciousness but not permanent injury. But not for this man. He would not live to ruin other's lives as he had Gard Callan's. The girl was throwing

furious words at Kurn:

"Who do you think you are, fool, to defy the laws of the Empire? You won't live to boast of this, I can tell you!" The girl's voice was more angry than frightened, and Gard knew by her accent she was from the planet of the Plastitechs...

"I am not one who obeys the Empire, little pigeon. The whole musty set of law books to the contrary, there is a higher law rules in this man's universe. The law of strength! What we want we take, we of the Mirgon League. And I happen to want you! Can you guess why?"

"Mirgon! One of the Mirgon's men! A spy, here on Terra?"

"What else, beautiful? We will have a fine time, you and I, before I turn you over to Mirgon. Can't you anticipate our pleasure together?"

The picture came clear to Gard, but it was a stunning revelation. The man had been a spy when he had managed to discredit Gard and get himself advanced in his place! And his superiors had been fools enough to let him get away with it! Kurn Lekro was a spy, and not just a disagreeable scoundrel. But this girl, why would he turn her over to Mirgon? Mirgon had his pick of the loot of a dozen planet cities, must have a harem second to none. What would he want with her? She must be a somebody. Gard raised his head to peer over the flat top of the skimmer at the pair now close on the other side.

He was just in time to see Kurn set the girl on her feet, holding her with one arm while he reached with the other for the door of the skimmer. Clumsily his hand touched the car, it bobbed, light as a feather in it's grav-warp field, back against Gard's knees, the bumper ring of glittering ever-steel catching him on the shins.

At the same instant, the girl twisted free of his grasp, started to race off into the tangle of limbs at the side of the wide needle-floored trail. This was his chance, Gard realized but his mind was caught off guard because of his glimpse of the girl's features. This—this was Vylara Ornil famous on Terra for her many talents, as well as her beauty—and besides the daughter of Bronn Ornil! And Bronn Ornil was nobody but the commander of the Empire garrison on this outpost of the Empire. Only a holiday planet, perhaps, but still important for it held by position a most important military position. Beyond lay the outlaw forces, incalculable in numbers, hidden, but somewhere beyond the rims of the empire of which Terra made one unit lay the horde for which Kurn had just declared he worked. The girl was important as a hostage, Gard knew, and the sudden impact on his mind of the significance of the scene before him was just enough to throw his preconceived plan of attack out of gear.

As the girl darted aside, Kurn managed to grasp the handle of the skimmer's door, threw it open, and turned to plunge after the girl. As the man turned his back, Gard leaped around the bulging round body of the skimmer, placing himself before the door.

In his hand the round chamber of the fission gun hummed as Callan pressed the preparatory charge into place by squeezing the butt plates together. Just as Kurn reached to grab the arm of Vylara, Gard barked:

"Release the girl, Lekro!"

He hadn't meant to give the man a chance for life, but at the last second his honor stood in his way. Besides, the girl was too close to his line of fire. Even as he heard with an odd

detachment the bristling menace in his own voice, the girl darted left out of line of fire. Lekro flung himself right and downward, spinning on his heel; taking one long crouching stride toward him, bringing up his gun to fire. He was plenty used to this sort of thing, Gard saw, to react with such snake-like quickness.

Even as he saw Lekro press the trigger, even as he realized the man had been too fast for his own confused mind to act, he yet had time before that bolt struck to appreciate the utter grace of the girl's slim darting figure, the utter poise of her head turned toward him, the beauty of the locks that her movement flung out haloed behind her neck and shoulders. There was no time to fire now, the minute fractions of seconds that had been his had passed in indecision—even if he put a bolt through the man's black heart, the power surging in the chamber released by that trigger would still strike him. Somehow Gard pressed the little blue lever at the side of the trigger, even as his curiously detached mind mused at its ability so to calculate under stress.

Watching the squirming blue shimmer that grew disc-like from the broad base of the barrel of his gun, watching it spread, wondering if it would meet the yellow bolt blazing now from the end of Lekro's weapon—Gard found himself half believing he *could* see all these things in that infinitesimal fraction of time left him to live.

His reactions were apparently so speeded that he himself lived now divorced from time, separate and God-like, watching his own death. With unbelievable slowness the blue hand on the gun butt, and even as he shimmer widened before his clenched let the muscles of his legs start to

draw him into a half-crouch to get behind the shimmering blue disc entirely, he mused there was plenty of time, plenty—why he could even remember the first day he had seen Lekro, let's see...

The yellow bolt struck the blue shimmer and blazed in a terrible staggering blow of fissioning force, and in the terrific brilliance of what must be his own destruction, Gard Callan saw pictured that first day when his stomach had crawled and his jaws clenched with desire to do battle with Kurn Lekro.

GARD CALLAN had been very proud of his lieutenant's eagles on his shoulders and cuffs. Not that the trim blue uniform with the gold braid and proud eagles was the reason he was proud. He was proud because out of so many he had been selected for the Mentatech. The Mentatech Corps was the most necessary cog in the whole machinery of the Imperial Military. It is very good to be needed, to know that if the delicate sensitivity of your mind falters, the whole ship falters, perhaps goes down.

Astrogation is a complicated function. The Mentatech had been developed from selected telepaths of superior sensitivity. There was a definite superiority indicated in winning the eagles and red crossed bars of the Mentatech. Their function was to mentally co-ordinate the whole mechanism of astrogation aboard the giant space cruisers of the Empire. They had been developed through centuries of trial and error. There was no better or more simultaneous method of getting results of one observation and calculation into the mind of another pilot, navigator or communications or executive officer. In time of war, gunnery and guided missiles, ray battery officers and torpedo-timing plotter crews had all

to be hooked up with each other's minds—through the co-ordinating minds of the Mentatech staff. It was stiff training, requiring lightning reflexes and perfect sensitivity in telepath reception, and few could qualify. There were too many hereditary factors involved, the receptor's cortex was of a definitely different grain than the average mind.

The Mentatechs had a stern code, for debauch or vice of any kind was apt to dull the reactions of the many thousand million nerve cells in the neurons; alcohol could kill some of the interneuronic connection patterns of the cerebral cortex. The inconceivable complexity of their co-ordinating mental exchange work required perfect mental health. They were proud of their abilities, and stern with any backsliders from the requirements of the code.

Callan, still with that bright deadly blaze of the fission beam in his eyes, remembered catching Kurn Lekro hullyling a crewman. It was a part of the Mentatech code never to take advantage of their rank. Lekro was knocking the man down as fast as he got up, knowing that the man would not strike back, for striking an officer was the one crime for which a crewman got the limit of discipline. Lekro thought there were no witnesses to his provocation. Callan remembered wondering why he went to all that bother just to make trouble, to cause hatred of the officers among the enlisted men. Now he knew. It had been a part of his work as a spy—a provocateur! Callan had calmly knocked Lekro down the exact number of times he had seen him strike the smaller crewman. But Gard Callan had not reported the incident. He could not bring himself to turn informer, and that had been his mistake.

Lekro had lain for him. Callan remembered the bitter taste in his usually sweet euphoria. On long voyages the sweet drinks with their instant sense of well-being, of rosy and complete relaxation, took the place of all the things they missed, took the place of girls and laughter and excitement. It was a good let-down from tension, and it gave no hang-over. There was nothing about it that could have caused the mental confusion that had gotten him into trouble. Someone had slipped him a drug, and Lekro was present. No one else had a motive.

IF HE had not been drugged, he would not have failed to halt that order to fire the aft torpedo tubes before the men had completed fixing the timers, closing the big blast doors, evacuating the gaslock. Twenty men would not have died from the premature firing of a whole series of unlocked torpedo tubes. It looked like criminal negligence on his part. The court-martial had fixed the blame squarely upon him and nothing so thin as a suspicion of being drugged would serve as an alibi. He had not even mentioned the suspicion. It would have sounded too much like a silly lie.

As his legs started that downward crouch, Callan wondered if enough of that fission-beam was going to spill over the edges of the shimmering force-shield his own gun was generating. It didn't take much of that deadly stuff to cause a lingering, agonizing death.

The blue shield of force spread, too exactly equal in area to be comfortable, the great blaze of yellow death mushrooming out precisely along the leaping force-field. Now, before he could fire again, he had to depress the force-field lever, fire through

the absent field, raise it again before Lekro fired back. The man was so quick Callan hesitated again, and from the gun in Kurn's big hand the blue force-field shimmered, and the two giant men stood there, each protected from the other's fire. It was the first time Gard Callan had ever duelled with the deadly weapons. But he had practised, daily, assiduously—and he knew he should be the equal of this double-crossing spy.

But Callan was forgetting his advantage. Lekro was not a trained Mentatech. He was only a spy, could not have the ability to know Callan's thought.

Callan sent his sensing out, reached for the inner springs of Lekro's mind, waited for the man's need to escape to make him desperate, heedless of safety. He anticipated the neural current Lekro sent to his fingers, to depress the shield lever, to fire, to reactivate the force field. Even as the blue shimmer faded, Callan's own shield was gone. He fired, caught Lekro's yellow blast on his own replaced blue force-field in a fountain of deadly energy, futilely blasting of force-lines. His bolt had not been fully caught by Kurn. The feathers of his foolish native head-dress fluttered, burnt away. The big, blocky figure staggered with the rush of air that replaced the air destroyed about him. Or was he really hit? Callan gritted his teeth in savage exultation. He could not even feel sorry that Lekro might undergo weeks of agony from the effects of that close blast of atomic dis.

Grimly Callan watched the realization that stole over Lekro's dark face. "So you recognize me, Kurn? You know you can't win! I know what you think before you think it! What are you going to do, Kurn? What now,

when you're up against a man who knows what you are?"

But Kurn wasn't waiting. He had one thing, speedier muscular reflexes, if he didn't have equal mental abilities. His thick leg muscles rippled as he drove his feet into the forest floor, leaping toward Callan, the blue shimmering force-shield protecting him, the pressure of it driving Callan back, pushing him aside. Digging in, his legs pistoning, Kurn drove the taller man back, whirled with his blue shield still intact between them, darted into the open door of the skimmer. Light as a feather the thing floated for an instant, then drove sharply upward, the blast of its air jet beating against the blue force-field in Gard's hand, lashing about his ears. Kurn Lekro was a diminishing brown and green dot above; in an instant the car had swept around a tree's great greenness—was gone.

WITH A deep sense of frustration, a sense of having failed his loyal Jak in his greatest need, of having failed in his sworn duty to protect these civilians innocently here in this primeval playground, Callan turned to the girl, lying where her darting flight had tripped her up, at the side of the trail.

His face dull and empty of emotion, his heart like lead, he bent to help her to her feet.

"You were magnificent, sir...?"

"Callan is my name, Gard Callan. And I wasn't magnificent, I let a murdering scoundrel and an enemy spy get away when I had him in my grasp. Don't compliment me, I'm not in the mood for playing hero. That swine shot my dog, Jak."

The girl gave a little cry, sorrow, consternation, bereavement suddenly realized. "Not the philosopher-dog, not Jak! Why, I saw him only yester-

day. Was he your dog? I knew him well! Oh, no! Never to see him again, never to hear him meditating..."

"He was a wonderful character. There is something clean about animal minds that men seem to have lost."

"And Jak was your dog. He attached himself to you. He was so distant with everyone. Just a little superior, Jak. It is another recommendation of your character to me, as if you needed any after saving me so courageously."

"I was hunting Jak's killer when I heard you cry out. That's how I happened to be here. Jak's devotion to duty brought me here in time. It was his last work for the men about whom he pondered so much."

"You know who I am, Officer Callan?"

"Yes, Vylara Ornil. I know who you are, but not what you are doing alone in these forests. Alone and unarmed. All the animals of these forests are not products of a cultured past, you know, as was Jak. What were you thinking?"

"It is hard to get used to the idea of savage natural life after years on a frigid planet. May I call you—Gard? I was with friends, we picniced, they swam, I fell asleep. I awoke, and they were all in the water. I walked along the trail forgetting, absently thinking of my father and his work—I'm here from school, you know, I have been away for over two years, and two years before that. One forgets one's habits."

"Lekro must have been using a distance telaug, spying on your father, watching his movements, reporting every thought to the pirates. They call themselves the Mirgon League—League indeed! I'd like to give them a broadside of guided torpedoes..."

The girl's sharp ears caught the

deep bitter hurt inside the man, wondered why he spoke of a broadside of torpedoes. It was unusual speech for a forest guide.

"I'd like to be your friend, Gard Callan. I sense a hurt in you that needs a woman's touch!" She was frankly offering him a great deal with her wide brown eyes on his, and Gard wondered. Then he realized that to her he was the man who had just saved her life, or from something worse, a life as a harem slave of the Mirgon nest. He was a shining hero, and her young heart was at his feet. But the effect of the blasts that had just now so nearly seared the life out of him left his emotions but aching deadness within him. He could not even rouse himself to return her smile of gratitude, but could only stare at the bright image of her vitality and grace, and let his inner senses wander over the seared and blasted, shock fields of burnt sensory screens within his mind. He might recover the ability to feel emotion, to appreciate beauty, to even fall in love. One never knew, after one had been exposed to a fission blast, whether one was doomed to go through life as an empty, sterile carcass of joyless life-in-death, or whether one's mental reactions would repair their wounds and function emotionally again. Or whether one would start rotting away tomorrow.

"I'm sorry I can't register, Vylara. Just before Kurn fired, I glimpsed your face and thought it the most beautiful I had ever seen. But I must have caught some of the splash of that first bolt, it was very close. I can't appreciate your beauty and your good intentions, now."

"I am a Junior Meditech, and a ray-nurse first class. I know exactly what you mean. We have studied such effects in our work. Moreover I know

what you need. You mustn't let depression overcome you. You will recover, I feel sure."

"I'll take you back to your party. Let's hope Kurn hasn't any friends nearby. We may get a return visit."

THE TWO walked along the wide trail under the vast trees. The air was vitally fresh and stimulating to Vylara. To Gard's singed sensory apparatus it was a dull monotony of weird emptiness. None of the pleasure he usually took in the sight and sound of the fecund forest life was with him now. His heart sank, for he knew very well that this condition might remain the rest of his life. If so, never again would he enjoy any simple pleasure of life again. His emotions, even such a simple pleasure as eating fruit, just would not function. Discouragedly he contemplated a future devoid of all pleasant sensation. There was nothing left worth working for, worth trying to have, nothing in the universe that could cause pleasure or joy for him. To top it, he had let the cause of his troubles escape again.

He knew that every male reaction in his body should be leaping to walk beside the woman whose beauty was more talked of than any other on Terra. Even as a child, her grace and charm had been remarked. And now, with Vylara Ornil beside him, he walked as dully as a stick of dead timber, as mechanically as a math-robot, and his tongue refused to emit a single word in answer to her bright chatter.

"Why did you ever take this sort of job, away from the thrill and glamour of everything? Out here in the forest, you do not even meet the vacationers except as we have met. A man like you, to shut yourself off from life in these green aisles! I

don't understand!"

"There was a reason, Vylara. I was disgraced, couldn't face my friends, the people I grew up with—I couldn't take it. I came here to Terra fully intending to live as a hermit. But they needed fighting men as guides here, because of the danger of Mirgon's occasional raids. They pressed me, I accepted. It was much the same thing, just waiting and watching the trails, Jak did the real work, I have just vegetated. Still, the forest gets under your skin. I love the gigantic trees, the great animals who live so long they acquire an intelligence almost equal to such cultured products of animal breeding as was Jak. One can talk to them, they have taught me much that a man of the frigid worlds never learns about life. There is a kinship in all life and there is a terrific competition in all such life. It is very different from the organized life we lead as members of a dominant race of space."

The trail came out upon the banks of the wide stream where it emptied into the broad crystal flow of the Mistyp river

"We'll have to hurry, Vylara! Lek-ro can return, you know. Are the members of your party armed?"

"We have two small needle-rifles. We thought we might like to try camping out, eating out, eating flesh right off the slaughtered animal. But we didn't have the heart to shoot a deer, they were so graceful and so friendly. We fed them instead!"

"That is usually the way with holiday campers."

"Our camp is only a little way now. Just beyond that leaning rock where the water has undercut..."

Her voice broke off. She seized Callan's big arm, pulled him under the shadows of a tree. Her little hand pointed upward. Approaching on a

steep silent glide was a skimmer, it looked like the same one in which Kurn had fled.

"You would make a valuable hostage for Mirgon. Your father should never have allowed this! If that skimmer has a scanner, and he sets the area under observation, he can't miss finding us. And he could pick me off at his leisure, then grab you."

The skimmer swam lower, slowly, obviously searching. Callan pushed the girl to the other side of the vast trunk, himself slid around until he got the car in his sights. Then he cursed, silently. There was no way to know if the occupant was friend or foe. He could not fire, not until the pilot fired upon him.

Lower, closer, the round full-bellied body swung as the pilot searched. Drifting light as a feather, the wind swinging it higher, now lower in its weightless condition within the grav-warp of its drive. The big round front panel was opaque to his eyes; he could not glimpse what lay within. It was fifty feet away; if it was Kurn, and he spotted him he would have to hold his fire till Kurn sent a beam toward him, which would be too late! There just wasn't any way to know till too late if the spy had returned, or if this was an ordinary skimmer out to enjoy the scenery.

Callan, his stomach crawling with the effort, stepped out of the shadows into plain sight. Narrowly he watched the hovering ship, if it darted toward him, he would have but one advantage—he was standing still; the other was moving. If it settled to earth? He refused to think. He just waited, watching. He didn't much care, anyway. But if that was Kurn, he was going to kill him before they parted again!

The gliding ship continued to descend, nearer and nearer, it was im-

possible for the occupants to fail to see Callan, yet he could not fire till he knew. The ship settled to the earth lightly as a leaf, and Callan's hand trembled a little with tension. Whoever stepped out of that door now opening was going to get it, the instant they made a sudden move.

They filed out, looking about, strangers to Callan, vacationers by the look of them. One was in uniform. They walked toward Callan, and suddenly Vylara flashed by him running toward them, crying out—"Father, O Father, I've had the narrowest escape!"

For a minute she clung to the man Callan now recognized as Bronn Ornil, Commander of the Military garrison on Terra. He had seen him before, once or twice. Then Vylara had released her father, was leading him toward Callan, and Gard felt the old faint shiver of apprehension at the glitter of braid, the broad black-and-red bars of the Commander—higher rank can be something to fear. But Ornil was smiling, holding out a big, darkly burnt hand. That hand put Callan at ease. This was no slick ornamental brass, this man had fired ray-cannon with his own hands when they were too hot to touch. Nothing else gave that dark brown scar tissue about the knuckles. Gard shook his hand, was introduced around by Vylara. He gave a confused answer to their voluble questions and exclamations, let Vylara do the talking. He was not much for social amenities any more. He kept waiting for the dreaded cold shoulder that had driven him from civilized life.

But Vylara took care of that with a vivid description of his gun battle with Kurn. If any of these people knew his story, they did not show it. These were important people, members of the staff of the military post,

in close touch with conditions. They must know what Kurn's bold attempt to kidnap Vylara meant, that the pirates had a base near at hand.

"I am grateful, Mr. Callan. Words can't tell you how grateful I am. Perhaps I shall be able to show my gratitude more substantially later on. Just now I've got to take steps to get that scoundrel Lekro behind bars."

"I knew Lekro. He was once on a ship on which I served." Callan's voice wavered, he could not bring himself to tell what he knew of the man, or why he hated him. His mind refused to explain to these people his disgrace.

"You knew him before, eh? That's interesting." Ornil was big, his voice deep and steady. He was a burly man, well fleshed but not fat, standing a good foot taller than Callan. His face was ruddy and round, a goodhumored man whom duty had made stern. Callan liked him. He liked all these people, longed to get into that ship and go with them into life again. But he paused at the open door of the skimmer, as the people entered expecting to say good-bye and god bless you. But Ornil would not have it.

"You can't leave us like this, Callan. I've got to make records to dis tribute to the search parties, so that they can identify Lekro. You can do that best, you know him best. Besides we ought to get acquainted; you've got a bigger duty than guarding this deserted bit of forest now. You've got to help catch Kurn Lekro!"

As Callan got into the ship, still in a half-daze from the shock of his neardeath, Ornil's big voice went on. Vylara made a place for him beside her; there was no other seat, Callan sat down. He was gratified to note a little thrill of pleasure run through him at her nearness; it meant that al-

ready the burnt screens of his sensory apparatus in his mind were repairing the damage. That meant that only the infra-red had spilled over the force-screen edge, not the first-order emanations with their deadly particles of undying disintegration to set up inside him a burn that would never heal.

ORNIL WAS saying: "Those Mirgon raiders have a base near at hand. We think it's on the moon somewhere, but we can't locate it. This Lekro was discharged from the service nearly a Terran year ago, Callan. He's been seen around. If I had dreamed he was working for Mirgon I would have had him picked up. But I thought perhaps it was a case like your own, an unavoidable accident of some kind..." Ornil faltered as Callan flushed; he saw that he had made a blunder by mentioning he knew Callan's record. Then he made the best of it.

"Well, there's no shame in it, Callan, however you feel about it. Better men than you have taken the blame for things that couldn't have been helped. Personally I think the whole idea of the Mentatech being responsible for everything is wrong. Something else should be devised. They wreck too many good men with that damned telepathic communication. It's too great a strain."

Callan wanted to get him off the subject. He said: "I wonder if you realize that Lekro's action in abducting your daughter means that Mirgon is planning a move against your garrison. He means to take over earth itself, and meant to use Vylara to render you helpless. I wouldn't underestimate the imminence of attack. He might strike tomorrow—today!"

The skimmer had risen above the trees now, was dodging along just

beneath the high thin cloud layer, which billowed down here and there as if to seize the speeding ship. Suddenly the telescreen gave a dramatic buzz; emergency call only used that deafening drone. On the screen appeared the stricken face of a distraught officer, his tunic collar open, evidently roused from sleep, or caught by sudden news...

"General alarm! Terrific explosion on the moon! The atomic research laboratories completely destroyed. Sabotage is indicated, but the result is more important than the attempted sabotage. The vast force of the explosion has upset the orbital balance of the satellite, according to the first hurried analysis by our Astro-techs. The moon may descend! Earth must be evacuated at once. Orders to all officers, prepare for immediate evacuation!"

The group in the skimmer, white-faced at the dramatic news, faced with the unknown significance of the unheard of peril of a descending satellite, turned as one to Commander Ornil.

But what he might have said or done was swiftly superseded in Callan's mind by the sight of a row of speeding dots, visible through the rear windows of the speeding vehicle. He stood up, shouting: "We are pursued. Pilot, full speed ahead! Take evasive maneuvers, get to safety at once!"

But the pilot, not knowing Callan, did not act immediately. He turned to Ornil for verification. That second of his hesitation was the last, for a blast of yellow heat blared through the fore-windows of the car, left only a smoking heap where the pilot had sat. The seat itself was blazing with the lingering, deadly atomic fire as Callan tumbled the smoking corpse from its place, reached over the blaze,

pushed the directional forward and full-down, pulled back the blast lever to full-on, sent the car screaming toward the face of the earth below. Vylara sprang to his side, as he took the pilot's blazing seat, and with her jacket wrapped around her hands, beat out the flames about him. As swiftly as the skimmer had plunged earthward, it righted, skimmed over and around the tall green spikes of the vast tree tops, darting in swift curves, its wide open drive leaving a trail of white steam from the heated air slowly condensing behind.

"They're right on our tail, Lieutenant! Keep her dodging!" It was Ornil, inadvertently calling him Lieutenant after his past rank, and Callan knew the man must have studied his dossier more than once to make such a mistake in the excitement. It felt good to hear the word again, himself. He opened the deadened ears of his mental hearing, trying to sense the intent of his pursuit, to outguess them by sensing with his telepathic ability what they planned. They were close, too close, his first dive had only given them a little more safety; now and again there burned past them the close, bright beam of a ray-blast.

Jumping the skimmer over the tree-tops like a scared rabbit, Callan sped on, weaving it back and forth, up and down, and suddenly he released the grav-warp to full, and the skimmer shot almost vertically upward with complete weightlessness. It was with a thankful heart that Callan saw the pale white mists thicken about the windows, knew they were in the cloud layer still unhit.

"**W**HEW," SAID Ornil, standing now, his big hand gripping the burnt fabric of the pilot seat. "Watch that red ball on the distance dial, Callan. It's our local gadget for

locating home. When we're over Cyclopolis, that red ball is right in the center. And leave that jet wide open, man. I don't want those birds any closer than they are now."

"Lekro came back with help, Vylara," murmured Callan, glancing up at the lovely face of the girl who was bent over his shoulder, watching the dials of his panel.

"You said he would, and he did. I should have warned Dad, made him speed for home the instant we reached the ship. But I was confused."

"I'm still a little wobbly or I would have insisted on it myself. We were floating along like a clay pigeon, waiting for that shot, and it cost a man's life."

Vylara bent closer, whispered softly in his ear. "You won't get court-martialed this time, Lieutenant."

The old sore place in his breast seemed to lessen at her words, and a warm feeling took its place. It was good to know someone understood that no man is omniscient. It was good to feel he had a friend. Something in Callan awoke from a long sleep, began to grow stronger. Vaguely he wondered why he felt so very differently, as if it was morning. Outside the darkness was closing in, far below the lights of Cyclopolis were coming on. Callan sent the ship toward the big open center of the circle of round dark openings that were Cyclopolis. They would soon be underground.

As he spiraled the ship toward the big field, the moon came in sight on his right, on the horizon, huge and red as blood. Callan gasped, then gazed curiously at the changed face of the satellite. A great star of black burnt soil and fused rock had been flung across one quarter of the glow-

ing round of the moon, a vast mar on the beauty of it. That had been the biggest blast in the history of atomic mischance!

The usual still, quiescent, calmly lovely face of the moon was further obscured by a moving, writhing cloud of fiery dust, crawling across the bland face; a face bland no longer, but marred and stricken and terribly hurt. There was now a slow spin to the orb, and under the writhing dark cloud the great dried seas and round pockmarks turned slowly. And almost visibly, the moon was descending!

"Did that officer announce that the moon was descending, or was thought-to-be descending?" Callan asked Vylara, gesturing with one hand to the terrible, distraught face of the moon, so painfully different than its ancient calm aspect.

"I don't remember, but he certainly didn't make it clear how terrible a catastrophe must have occurred. Can there be any living thing left up there?"

"No. Vylara, no creature could have lived through a concussion great enough to mar a quarter of the moon! Look at the size of the burn, and remember that the concussion waves are always hundreds of times greater in expanse. Effective concussion of a blast like that would have slain every person on an orb six times the size of the moon!"

Below them, the great space terminal of Terra was aboil with life. About the dozen or so space ships still in their cradles a mob of citizens were clamoring for entrance, while guards strove vainly to drive the people back from the rocket blast area so that the ships could take off. Callan glanced at Ornil, wondering whether he was going to be equal to the evident stress ahead.

BUT COMMANDER Ornil was in deep conversation, his face close to the speaking orifice of the tele-screen, and in the screen was the same distraught face of the officer who had announced the catastrophe.

Callan let the skimmer drift on its grav-warp just above the heads of the milling throng. There was no place to set it down on the field. People pushed and shoved, trying to get out from under. Finally an open spot appeared. He set it down.

"Don't show your face, Commander. They'll mob you, they don't know what they are doing."

"I've got to get down to the base! I can't wait around here till the mob gets ready to quiet down!"

"Take you an hour to push through! I'd better try to take you directly there...better, why don't you fly the skimmer. You know where you want to go, I don't."

Ornil took Callan's place, lifted the car again, sent it skimming over the crowd's heads. Callan had never been to the extensive cities beneath the surface. He had no wish to mix with the people who made Terra their home. They were alien to him, though they spoke the same language, separated by a thousand differences of custom and training. They were trades people who lived on the holiday seekers, small manufacturers, pioneers who used Terra as a base for expeditions into unknown space beyond the Empire's rim. They were entertainers, theatrical vagabonds, panders, and the military garrison...

From the great round cavern opening toward which Commander Ornil sent the craft, a steady stream of small flyers was pouring skimmers, as well as the less-common, bat-like strato-planes which were capable of short space flights to pick up and take

off passengers from space-liners too heavy to make the landing on Terra. Against this unprecedented rush of traffic Ornil found himself helpless, and the small skimmer hovered and darted here and there, hoping for an opening to show where he could dart through to enter the down channel of the big tunnel...

"The fools, why can't they await properly organized evacuation? Do they think the moon can fall in seconds?" muttered Ornil, his eyes glaring desperately about.

"When you know the moon can fall, you don't know what to think!" murmured Vylara. "That is one occurrence I never expected to have to worry about. It's a little upsetting..."

Callan smiled as the girl endeavored thus to calm her excited parent.

"Why don't you just set the car down anywhere and direct the staff by televisual contact? Vylara and I and the others can get out, force our way through, and bring back a military escort that will get you through, in a hurry. We'll all have to get busy, or we'll have chaos, riots, death, looting—anything can come of this; especially if the people learn that they can never all be evacuated in time."

"What makes you say they can't be?" asked Ornil sharply, his reddened face jerking to peer at Callan.

"Look at the moon, and do a little calculating yourself. It has reached the zenith, and is still as large as it was when it was magnified by the earth's atmosphere. That means a tremendous rate of fall. The explosion must have been precisely calculated to send it toward earth, must have been on the far side."

"So you think it was no accident, Callan?"

"It was no accident, it had a purpose. That purpose could be only to

destroy all resistance on Terra for some raiding party. Since they were probably at the moon to arrange the explosion, and since the flight usually takes four hours, you can count on an armed attack upon Cyclopolis within," Callan glanced at the time-sphere that hung on a chain about his neck, "within a half-hour at the most, perhaps sooner."

"But they haven't destroyed resistance here!" Ornil almost shouted, unwilling to face the logic so coldly outlined by Callan.

"Haven't they? You have not been to barracks since the catastrophe. The officer who announced the moon explosion was unusually upset. I would deduce there had been some trouble in the fortress, perhaps the whole garrison nearly destroyed, perhaps by gas, perhaps by some other means—who knows?"

Commander Ornil sat stiffly, visibly trying to regain complete control of his emotions. He was furious, not with Callan, but with the inescapable face of disaster that grew ever greater before him.

AFTER A moment his color lightened, and he half shouted at Callan. "Man, I think you're right! You get out of here, and call in every forest ranger; get those brass-bound heads of the forestry into action. They may be the only organized group on the planet still alive! Arm them with everything you can lay hands on, and here is your authorization. Just show your officers this, and say I said to take your orders. Now get going!"

Callan got out of the car, began to force his way through the mob toward the distant tall spire which marked the offices of the Forest Guard organization. They were semi-military,

drilled only for fire fighting and kindred emergencies, but they were good men and hardened by a life of danger in the vast, teeming outdoors of the playground planet. It was their job to kill off every dangerous type of wild life, to make the planet one great park of trees and streams and gentle animals—and they were too few for the job, lived a life of activity and constant danger in consequence.

Callan glanced at the disk Ornil had pressed into his hand. It was gold, and bore a double-headed eagle on one side, a figure of a man mounted on a horse-like animal on the other. It bore a cryptic inscription. Callan guessed it was the mysterious "Order of Peril", possession of which gave any man dictatorial powers during emergency.

But why had the Commander given it up when his own men might be dead, and there might be no one alive who was qualified to accept him as Commander of the Military? Why had he given up a tool like "The Order of Peril" when he was so apt to need its sweeping gift of power himself?

Callan did not know that possession of the talisman was given only after oath, an oath which required surrender of the talisman to any person showing greater ability to meet the emergency requiring its use.

Not even sure that he was suddenly Dictator of the whole planet, but knowing that responsibility had been shoved abruptly onto his shoulders, Callan plowed through the mob, bowling the softer-bodied city dwellers right and left ruthlessly. It was no time to be polite.

Vylara, who understood the confusion which had overtaken her father and caused the sudden decision to pass on his job to Callan, leaned over

Ornil's distraught face and kissed him gently.

"I knew you could do it when the time came, Dad. That's the biggest thing I ever saw you do. Now I can say I'm proud to call you Dad."

"Let's pray I did the right thing, girl. I just wasn't ready for all this, and he was. Let's hope he knows the weight I've passed on to him, and that he has the shoulders to bear it."

The stocky figure of Commander Ornil half rose, then collapsed weakly into the seat again. For a minute he pillowed his head on the girl's shoulder, pressing his hand to his chest.

"I know, Dad. The Medico told me, any excitement might prove fatal. You did the right thing." Vylara's face was a Madonna's.

"You've got to admit it took the whole damned moon to excite me," muttered Commander Ornil, as he lapsed into unconsciousness.

THE MOON, whole sections of its surface blasted free, had assumed the appearance of a segmented dragon, trailing clouds of ice dust, vast fragments of rock, spouting fire from several erupting volcanoes brought to life by the cast-off shell exposing their inner fires.

During the day it trailed its terrible new members across the sky like a vast white ghost, pursued by pale demons. During the night it glowed, spat fire and vast white clouds of steam and ice dust sped across the sky terribly, its orbital speed vastly increased by the added speed of its descent. It was now a vast comet, one end of it speeding out of sight beyond the far horizon, the other end still coming up beyond the other horizon. Serpent of doom, its size and aspect completely terrifying, there was no doubt that the moon was going to

strike the earth, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that it was almost certain death to remain upon the earth longer.

Callan had called in every flying ship of Forest Service, every man every tiny one-man skimmer—every possible weapon.

His tiny army once organized, Callan declared martial law. Lying outside the now deadly moon orbit were a dozen great liners of space. As rapidly as they could the little strato flyers shuttled back and forth, carrying people chosen by lot to safety. But it was becoming more obvious every hour that not nearly half of the population was going to be rescued unless new forces and ships arrived on the scene. It was this expectation of a rescuing fleet that caused too many to wait, too long.

Callan's prophecy of attack to Commander Ornil had not come true. He was not puzzled, only realized that the pirates were awaiting the exact moment of greatest confusion to strike. He had contacted the garrison of the major fortress in Cyclopolis caverns, only to find, as he had expected, that an explosion of the magazines had killed over half of the meagre garrison.

That the pirates still waited told Callan they were not as numerous as he had thought them, or that they had other irons in the fire which required their attention. If he could have seen the great liners full of refugees outside the moon's rapidly decreasing orbit, if he could have known they were being boarded one by one and taken over by Mirgon's men, he might have known what was brewing when an unannounced fleet appeared above the great space-port, began to circle strangely, as if reluctant to land. He might have realized in time that these

apparently peaceful ships, coming in to take off the panic-stricken population, were not peaceful. But he was fooled, as was Commander Ornil, once more on his feet and busily putting the great fortress of Cyclopolis again in some kind of shape to repel attack. They could have rayed the ships, could have sent thousands of controlled explosive rockets into the fleet—but they did none of these things. They waited, watched, and held their fire, feeling sure that the general panic had superseded the usual attention to military procedure.

Then suddenly it was quite too late, and the ships had landed, opened their locks to spew forth the brown tunics of Mirgon's horde, the one great cruiser of war lying there dominating the scene of the evacuation with its powerful new weapons had been boarded by men wearing the blue-and-gold of the Empire, acting as if sent to reinforce the crew against attack. So quickly, so expertly had the ruse been carried out, that Callan could not believe what had happened. The space-port itself had fallen, the people remaining on Terra were doomed! Callan was not thinking of himself, he was seeing the million mothers clutching their babes and watching the terrible descent of the nemesis that the moon had suddenly become—he was seeing the whole fair park-like surface of earth burnt and blasted and covered with the vast rushing tides the moon would pull up out of the sea, seeing the earth as it was going to be so very soon—a globe covered only with islets of mud and vast rushing waves of ocean battering all before them. Waves miles high... Callan bent his head into his arms, cursing the heartless, ferocious nature of the pirate Zolar Mirgon, who could doom the population of a

planet in order to bring about a coup that would give him another score of fighting ships, another thousand cargo-spacers. For loot and ships to carry it, this man Mirgon had turned into the murderer of millions!

THE CAPTURED war-cruiser was spinning about on its launching cradle; the great guns, whose secrets men had died to protect from spies, were swiveling, coming to bear upon the underground fortress, the great glittering penetrative beams were reaching out, feeling slowly down and out and down for the nerve-centers of Commander Ornil's base, and Terra's last defense.

Desperately Callan pulled the Mentatech co-ordinator of the Forest guards' trifling troubles; these rocks, his seat, sent him spinning across the room with one great headless hand.

Clamping the big Menta-cap about his temples, Callan sent his sensing into the field of power thrown over the city and the tall rims of the forest beyond the great circle of cavern entrances; that field of sensing that had never been used for anything but contacting and reporting forest Guards' puny weapon-board hack from et tubes that had never been used for anything but firing the great carbon-dioxide fire-extinguisher cylinders into the heart of some incipient blaze out in the endless forest.

With one hand Callan checked the rocket tubes, swung them to hear on the big cruiser hulking up from the center of the space-port. With a feeling of utter futility he fired the big harmless rockets of gas under pressure, knowing that the only effect upon the armor-plate of the Imperial war-wagon would be to confuse their aim, perhaps to delay them until Ornil could go into action.

The flaming, harmless, but deadly-appearing gas-rockets arced out over the circular field. Callan's heart leaped as the first exploded harmlessly against the bow-plates, puffing out the volumes of expanding gas meant to put out a fire only. He smiled as one by one the breathing ports of the ship clicked shut, at least he had gotten a little carbon-dioxide into the ship. Desperately he examined the tiny co-ordinator panel for other devices which might prove to be at least scare-weapons.

Automatically he noted the excited vaunting of the pirate minds within the captured cruiser; the dying despair of the blasted minds of the fission-rayed crew; the aura of desperate fear sent up from every mind in the city beneath, in the scattered low surface buildings.

The tall spire of the Forest guard building rocked beneath him as the cruiser sent a great green ray flicking toward him. He felt the tower shudder as the supports disintegrated. His heart leaped as from the caverns below a great impenetrable protection spread about the tower. The rocking ceased, the tower still stood.

The fraction of a second of his attack upon the cruiser had given the garrison below enough warning, had been time enough, and they were in the battle now!

He watched the big war-cruiser beat against the blue force-fields, sending beam after beam down into the blue shimmer that definitely located the fortress now, watched the shudder of unleashed power splashing raw death in great fountains of green fire where the penetrative mysterious deathrays of the cruiser struck the protective blue wall of the force fields of Ornil's warriors.

AS LONG as the cruiser could force the garrison to keep that force field in place, the city was theirs. Callan saw that they could loot the whole city, pack off the pick of its value, and at the last ascend into space with every objective attained, so long as the fortress maintained the shimmering blue field of force.

His racing brain sought an answer to the enigma, while he cursed the stupidity that had allowed the spaceport to fall into the pirates' hands.

The telerad in the corner buzzed. Callan got up, glanced at the co-ordinator he had tossed from his seat minutes ago. The man grinned, he held no ill-will. There had been no time for anything else. Callan crossed to the instrument, switched it. Commander Ornil's face appeared on the screen, his harried, deathly weary voice struck at Gard in clipped, hurried phrases.

"I'm going to surrender. I'll have to get the people off. I'll cease resistance. It's their only chance!"

Gard saw the man was cracking up. "There's no sense to that, Commander! Zolar Mirgon will promise anything, do nothing but kill you and the others who might hinder him, abandon the rest! Do you think he'll wait here to take off the population? The Empire forces must be only hours away now. That falling moon is a beacon across the whole sky. They won't miss it. They'll be here. We'll have to figure out some way of delaying the pirates. Hang on, man. Surrender is the worst thing you could do."

"I hate to think of all those lives on my head, Callan!"

"They're better off dead than at Mirgon's mercies, Commander! Stick it out!"

The telerad was a device whose long waves were able to penetrate the force field that stopped all atomic fission emanations. For a minute Callan watched the pale, death-sick face of the Commander. He saw now that the man was too sick to carry on.

He switched it off, turned back to the big screen where the whole space-port lay outlined in the pale dismal light. Rain was coming down in thick sheets, such rain as he had never seen before. The moon must be tearing the whole upper envelope of air apart, pulling vast stato-winds into birth, shoving hot air into cold strata at terrific velocity. Terrific winds were whipping across the smeared picture of the port. Gard stared; bent to make sure. Yes, the Mirgon "league" was landing more men, a dozen long, fast, passenger ships were diving in fast! Behind them Gard made out three great shapes. Spinning the far-focus he brought the three shapes close. His heart sank. Three more great battle cruisers, each with the Star and Crescent of the Mirgon League.

The pirates must be figuring on stripping the planet of every weapon, every bit of value. Gard wondered if they would take the time to grab slaves, too. Probably they would have time for a few thousand women.

He spun the focus again, watched the awful sight of the down-speeding satellite. He wished for a super-brain, able to calculate the speed of descent from such swift observation. To his eye they had perhaps two days, but it was more likely only one until the tides that grav-pull would raise, would sweep clear around the earth equator, wipe out every trace of life, of man's occupancy. Even those titanic trees would snap and fall and rush along with the water, miles deep. He knew that much from his study of other similar events in the

far past on other planets. Such close approaches of collisions between bodies left each scoured clean or riven through and through and broken, dead fragments of what had been a life-planet.

GARD CALLAN, his face a mask of decision, walked back to the big telerad in the corner. He snapped it on with one swift jerk of his broad hand. As Commander Ornil's face appeared, Gard said:

"I was wrong, Commander. Surrender is their only chance. There's no time left for anything else. Let the pirates have their will. Perhaps they will evacuate the people for ransom or slaves or just because they are human too. At least their death won't be on our heads."

The man turned weakly, like a robot, began to speak into another screen close at hand. In the screen Gard glimpsed the dark, grinning face of the man he knew must be Zolar Mirgon.

Gard switched the instrument off at once. Then he spurted into action.

Below the big chamber of co-ordination, where Gard had been trying to get the fullest use out of the inadequate equipment, were the barracks rooms and the armory of the Forest Guard. Down there were now some two hundred men, trained in many an emergency, fire-fighters extraordinary, with many skills apt to prove useful in a fight.

Gard raced down the long spiral ramp, stood in the center of the room. At the long windows scores of men were stretched out, fission rifles in hand, staring futilely over the sights at the scene in the space-port. They could not fire as long as the screen was up. They rose as Gard strode in, and his voice startled them with its

intensity as he shouted to them:

"In three minutes the force-field screen goes off. We're surrendering, the garrison thinks. But I've a ruse in mind. If you're with me, I want volunteers. Extra-hazardous, maybe. Don't hesitate, for if we fail or don't try, we'll die anyway."

They stepped forward to a man. Gard's heart leaped, he was right about the forest. It did something fine for a man. These forest guards had courage.

"All right, get those pert green uniforms off, get into your poorest outfit of civvies. What we're going to do can't succeed with a uniform among us. They've got to think we're friends of theirs. We've got to look dirty, desperate, bloodthirsty. We've got to act exactly as those scum out there are acting. When we get into one of the battle cruisers, do I have to tell you what comes next?"

The roar that answered him was enough. It deafened him. The men stripped off the proud green uniforms in seconds. Slipped on soiled, worn synthetic tunics of fabricoid, and boots. Belted on the round-bellied fission guns, over their rough tunics, low on their hips, swinging loosely, rubbed the grime of the floor into their faces and chins. As Gard raced back up the ramp to throw off the force-screen, the men filed out of the tower, took their places in loose disorder here and there at the rim of the area enclosed by the field. As it flicked off, they sidled out into the whipping rain and the suddenly painfully blasting wind, bent over double, ran with long steps charging through the milling, maddened people. Exactly the way they had seen the pirates treat the civilians, so did they, swinging a hard fist to every head that blocked their path. Their scattered

paths through the mob toward the pirate vessels in the port was marked every few steps by a fallen citizen, ruefully rubbing his face or stomach and cursing the men of Mirgon.

Callan loped along in the wide wake left by his men. Here and there he noted a hurrying figure carrying on its shoulder a smaller, struggling female. He knew that the pirates must be grabbing every attractive female, carting them off to the ships for the victory celebration. Passing a small weeping girl half his size, Callan caught her up, flung her to his shoulder, ran on across the wide field. He hoped his men had the wit to do likewise. It not only helped to conceal their faces, it served as a passport to enter the ship and deposit their struggling booty. He bellowed, "Grab those girls! We'll need plenty of fresh sporting blood where we're heading."

As they neared the now lighted loom of the great ships, the mob thickened. Callan saw that the crazed people were trying to force their way into the ships' open locks, unknowing what had happened, or too fear-stricken to understand.

NOW AND again the guards at the open locks lifted their guns, blasted away the press with flaming death. Callan raged at the ruthless slaughter, noted that as each blast cleared a path, the waiting pirates darted through the press into the open, entered the ship. The mob surged back, pressure from the endless milling throng pushing them forward into certain death.

Water streamed from every face, the wind was a monster that tore and beat with evil, dripping hands; and flames could be seen in the distance, fires had been started here and there

by looters. Callan shook his head as his mind insisted on visualizing the immense sum of terror and pain and death being added to the destruction all over Cyclopolis. Lightning ripped storm clouds; the thunder blasts could not be distinguished from the intermittent firing of weapons in the distance.

But now his few scores of men were close to the great round locks of the big cruiser which Mirgon's men had first captured. The mob was pressing closer again, the guards were swinging up their big beam guns to mow a path for the burden-bearers they supposed were their own members. Callan kept his face behind the form of the girl screaming on his shoulder. Her hands beating at his head felt like gusts of wind; futile, weak, and utterly pitiful.

He closed his eyes as the deadly light of the fission beams mowed a path of death into the mob, hoping the guards were not as careless of their fellows' lives as they were of the maddened, bear-stricken populace. As the pressure ahead lessened and fell in rows to the hard surface, Gard saw the beams flick out, dashed ahead into the open port, the men standing there idly staring over the piles of dead they had created did not even challenge him. After him he heard the pounding feet of his own men. But Gard was watching a figure he did not recognize, a swarthy desperado carrying a great gold urn on his head. Gard knew he hadn't picked that up in the field outside. Where that man went, he would go.

As Gard started to follow, the man barked, "Women in the forward hold. Comrade, where have ye been? Goid to the rear."

Gard darted toward the bow, want-

ing to get forward anyway. It was closer to the bridge where the head of this many-bodied adder sat watching the death of a planet.

At the first crossing corridor, he stopped, directing first one man to the left, the next to the right, till two score had passed him. He waited no longer, but raced on ahead; he wanted to reach the passage up to the bridge with a good force, but he knew his men could be depended upon to try very hard. He felt sure that before many seconds had passed there would be an alarm from over-eagerness on his Forest Guards part. When that happened, Callan wanted to be in command of the bridge, of the co-ordinating instrument board, where a Mentatech should be in time of war.

He passed armed Mirgon men again and again without a glance, most of them were reeling drunk, the others were occupied with their own affairs. He surmised each of them was concealing some bit of loot in a personal hiding place to avoid the share distribution of which Mirgon would receive the lion's share.

A HEAD CALLAN glimpsed the long stainless Cuno—metal stair curving familiarly up to the big instrument chamber in the nose of the cruiser. Down this stair an officer, only to be recognized as such by the two-peaked cap and the big gold crescent and comet-tailed star of the Mirgon league, pursued a buxom girl, who ran screaming, stumpled and fell the last six steps, rolling. The man bounded down and stood astride the girl, pulling back her head by the long dark tresses, gloating over the desperate fear in her face. Callan held his control with difficulty. It was no time to lose all for the sake of a few minutes of hysteria from a

girl. It was time for clear thinking.

But the two figures bore familiar outlines, and Callan tugged out his heavy gun, held it leveled, slid silently forward to see who the pair were.

The girl's face, white in the none too bright light, proved a stranger's. But the burly, quick moving figure now pulling the girl to her feet, was Lekro! In the same instant that Callan recognized him, he looked up, saw Gard, saw behind a steadily advancing line of strangers. His mind leaped behind his eyes to find an escape from those leveled, staring guns. His eyes swept around, back up the empty stair, and like a flash he had leaped, not up the stair where their fire would have brought him tumbling down in death, but clear across the corridor and into a narrow passage almost invisible from Callan's position.

Callan's bolt seared the white metal an inch from his disappearing figure.

Callan turned to the men behind him, beckoning them on, pointing up the stair. "Get the bridge, this Lekro is my meat."

Callan had deduced from Lekro's failure to cry out that the bridge room at the top of the stair was empty, that Lekro was racing off to the Commander's quarters to raise the alarm.

This ship was familiar, it was almost an exact duplicate of his own former ship, the *Stargazer*. The narrow passage down which Lekro had disappeared came out on the main corridor two hundred yards away. It was a service passage, for convenience only. Callan did not race after Lekro, but set off at top speed to get to the opening on the main corridor before Lekro.

Lekro was fast, but was he fast on a straight run, or only quick in dodg-

ing, in short bursts? He had to reach that opening before Lekro emerged, and his long legs pumped with his whole drive in them. Ahead a dark figure emerged, stopped, glanced back.

Gard collided painfully with the burly spy. The man had paused to glance into the big corridor before entering, and Callan was as surprised as Kurn Lekro to find his hands grappling for Lekro's throat, his gun knocked out of his grasp in the collision.

Lekro had retained his own weapon, and with an evil grin swung the muzzle to bear on Gard's panting chest. Gard seized the wrist bearing the gun, twisted it over his shoulder, heaved hard. Lekro flew over his head, crashed into the metal of the corridor wall with a sound like a piledriver. The gun fell, bounced. Lekro collapsed like a sack of meal, but as Gard bent to look at his face, he rolled like a cat, kicked hard into Callan's ankles, was up as Gard staggered off balance.

He darted toward the gun between them on the floor, but Gard's boot heel was coming up, caught him flush on the forehead. He went over backward, rolled once, came up boring in.

Lekro seemed unhurt. He lashed out a straight right, Gard got under it, hooked with his left, brought up a looping right which drummed on Lekro's ribs, his knuckles burned deep as his fist slid across Kurn's ribs.

LEKRO stepped back, arms wide, waiting for Callan to come in. Gard guessed he knew that time was on his side, had realized there were but few of the Imperial force, that an alarm was sure to be the end of them. Gard left his feet in a dive, his arms grappled Lekro about the hips, brought him down, his great

weight crushing as the man rolled under him. Savagely his arms slid up, up, as the man thrashed and kicked, trying to free himself for a punch. With a deep sense of satisfaction Gard's right arm went over Kurn's left, his elbow cracked as his arm crooked about the spy's neck. Savagely he hurled his weight right, then left, tightening his throttling hold on the heavy, swift-purple neck beneath his eyes. The terror suddenly sweeping over Lekro's face as his lungs labored for air was sweet, Gard grinned into the beet-red face with animal delight.

With utter abandon of science he brought up his left arm and tightened it about Lekro's ears, then like a bear he shook him; right, left, right, then twisted hard—waiting with tensed senses for the snap he felt sure must come. Back and around went Lekro's face, and just as he felt the bones crunch he shouted into the ear beneath his bleeding lips:

"This is for Jak, swine!"

Even after he knew he was dead he still twisted that heavy, silent face away from him, his anger burning out slowly.

But there was no time for this, and he rose, stirred the body once with his foot, picked up Lekro's gun and holstered his own when he found it twenty feet away.

To Callan's knowledge the original Commander's quarters lay about half-way along this corridor, it ended in the big central salon amidships. Callan ran back to the bridge chamber, found his men gathered about the stair, completely at sea in this big complicated mass of steel and copper and cables and instruments. Forest men were not space men.

Callan took half, a good forty men, and after shouting:

"Hold this control room at all costs,

we'll be back directly," sped back toward the Commander's quarters.

At the big double door of the Master chamber, he spotted his men. Each connecting cross-corridor was blocked, and ten men at each side of the door held leveled guns trained on that wide Durocalc black door. Callan shouted:

"Open up, Chief, hell's loose! We've got to see you!"

The door swung silently inward, the room beyond seemed empty to his eye. A swift sense of alarm flooded Gard's nerves, he felt that Mirgon must know, had set this trap to catch him.

As he hesitated, a voice bellowed: "Well, come in, what are you waiting for?"

Gard slid through the door, ducking instantly to one side to leave the door clear for his men to enter.

There were three officers sprawled in great lounge chairs, two pretty young women half undressed, and a variety of bottles such as Callan had never seen anywhere except behind a bar. Along the wall sat six others, out of uniform, evidently awaiting orders, for they were neither drunk nor drinking.

Callan stood for a second, his gun swinging slowly from one man to the next. He heard the sound of his followers at his right, coming through the door. One of the officers, his hands free of glass, bottle or woman, slid suddenly down behind the big desk behind which he sat. From beneath the desk his gun belched a column of flame directly toward where Callan would have been if he had waited.

GARD dropped to the floor as the man slipped downward, answered his bolt with a well-placed return beam, and from under the big

desk came only a spiraling wisp of smoke and a strong odor of burnt flesh. Six other leveled guns were now in the room, and Callan barked at one of the sober men along the bench beside the wall:

"Which one is Mirgon?"

"Mirgon is in the inner room, soldier."

"How many with him?"

"Maybe a dozen, they are planning the course from earth."

The pirate he interrogated made no bones about answering. He was staring directly into the mouth of the hand fission-ray. Callan's face, bloody and savage of eye, told him here was a man in the heat of battle, with his blood up, who would not hesitate to kill instantly. He answered, calmly and carefully, and Callan believed he was telling the truth.

"This is fine discipline he keeps," murmured Callan to the man, his eye glancing once around the disordered room, the empty bottles, the huddled frightened girls, the two drunken officers staring owlishly.

"He always lets up on discipline after a raid is finished. He *thought* this one was finished."

There were now over a dozen forest men in the big ante-chamber of the Commander's quarters. Callan hesitated, glancing at the big metal door behind which waited the leader of the Outlaw League.

As he looked at the door, he saw it open a crack, then instantly close again. He reacted automatically, from the big chamber of his weapon the yellow-bright beam leaped, did not flash out again, but remained on, spilling out its contents in a steady stream of fearful destruction. The resistant metal of the door spouted fountains of flame and hot metal,

from behind the door came a long agonized scream. It took a long minute of painful heat as the very air in the room became saturated with disintegrant atomic fire particles, and each and every man flung himself to the floor to avoid breathing the super-beated air.

Then the door crumpled and Callan shut off his near-empty gun, flung it to the floor, stepped over to the man whom he had questioned, took his gun from his bolster. Rapidly he deprived the other men on the bench of their weapons, flung them in a pile on the floor. From beyond the door came only a steady, horrible groaning.

Holding his breath, Gard strode through the boiling cloud of smoke still wreathing the doorway, he could see nothing beyond. He kicked the fragments of the door away, ducked low, charged through, the fresh weapon spouting a stream of deadly fire ahead. Through, he flung himself side-ways to the floor, to see the long chart table, papers flung here and there, turned-over chairs, and one lone officer dying there beside the door. Mirgon had left but instants before.

Callan did not hesitate, but charged across the big chamber and into the service passageway that he knew was the only possible means of escape. Gambling that Mirgon was less familiar with the layout of the ship than himself, he sped down the narrow passage, to hear the sound of running feet ahead. He spun around the corner, brought up against the wall, and saw a scramble of figures ahead trying to get up a ladderway all at once. He had counted on confusion at this point, the service passage ended in a tiny stair way up to the ship's galley, no more than one man could get up

at a time. Calmly Callan began to fire, shooting the man half way up the ladderway first, and as he tumbled, the man behind. His gun pulsed in his hand as he coldly killed all of the men at the foot of the ladder—all but one. Two of the men whirled to return his fire, but too late. He recognized Mirgon from descriptions he had heard. Ugly as sin, he was a powerful and very tall figure, and his dark, black-browed face was scarlet with rage as he whirled and pulled a gun. Callan flipped the lever of his forcefield shield, bounded forward as the yellow-white atomic fire blossomed before his eyes on the curve of his shield, pressed the shield hard against Mirgon's chest, drove with his legs, pinned him against the wall.

The fission gun was pressed by the force of the shield flat against the passage wall. He flicked off the shield, seized the hot barrel of the gun as Mirgon strove to bring it into line, twisted it from his hand even as the fire leaped again from the muzzle. He dropped it, his hand stinging with the poisonous fire, hoping as always such slightly wounded men hope, that it was not too serious. For no man ever knew whether he was doomed to slow death from radioactive poisoning or whether he would recover.

BUT THERE was no time for such thought. He pushed Mirgon ahead of him, back along the passage and into the big chamber of the Commander. Several of his men had followed, witnessed the short sharp struggle, the sudden death of some nine fighting men at the point of Callan's blazing gun, and as he entered with Mirgon unwillingly centered on his gun muzzle ahead of him,

a cheer broke out from the throats of the Forest men, a cheer that warmed Callan's heart and drove away the last trace of his bitterness against his fellow man.

Gard shoved the pirate leader into a chair, and for a time ignored him. He threw open the telerad channel to the fortress, threw it shut as he saw on the screen an unfamiliar face, with the rayed star and crescent on the shoulder.

Next, Callan called the control room of the bridge, found his forest men still in possession there.

"We've got most of them in irons on this ship, Chief," the big forest guard watching the screen assured him.

"Go to the brig and see if they kept any of the regular crew alive. There should be at least a few prisoners there, and I need men in uniform for our next step."

For a minute Callan watched the control room on the screen before him, noting if any of the men there were capable of firing the heavy armament of the cruiser if they needed to. He had just decided to replace them with experienced men, and as his hand lifted from his gun butt to flip off the telerad switch, Mirgon's long hands made a subtle movement, a tiny needle-gun appeared like magic in his long, pale palm.

The men about him were not watching Mirgon. The movement he had made in dropping the gun from his sleeve had been too slight to cause attention to be directed to him. Callan stared at the gun, he could not move toward his own weapon without that deadly needle leaping toward his heart.

SOFTLY Gard spoke, "What good would it do you, Zolar? The ship is in our hands."

"It will be again in my hands, now."

A deep tug of sorrow went through Callan. If Jak had been here he would already be at Mirgon's sinewy throat, tearing the life out of him. Jak would not even have thought of himself or of danger—he would have leaped into certain death for his friend Gard Callan.

The Forest men watched the suddenly dominant pirate leader. They knew a move by one of them toward a weapon would cause Callan's death and possibly several more. There were now but ten of them in the room, Callan and Mirgon making twelve. They knew that Callan wanted Mirgon alive, had a use for him. They waited.

Suddenly the tall forester nearest Mirgon stepped squarely in front of Mirgon, staring down at him.

"If you want to do me a favor, fire that gun. I took a bolt along my shoulder earlier today, and I know what I'm in for. Your little toy weapon doesn't scare me, I'm already dead. Now if you want some rough handling, go ahead and fire."

His big capable hands reached out, seized the pirate's wrists, exerted terrific pressure. The big pirate screamed once, then sat there, writhing with pain. Whether the wrists were broken or only twisted painfully, Callan didn't know. He felt only a deep gratitude toward the powerful comrade who had been as faithful to him as Jak would have been. The little needle gun lay on the floor where it had fallen from the pirate's grasp. The big forester bent and picked it up, tossed it on the desk before Callan.

Callan grinned his thanks and then turned again to the telrad screen, still on.

The man in the screen spoke

quickly, before Gard could switch off the beam. "Commander Ornill and Vylara, his daughter, are being brought under guard to the ship." Callan stepped to the shattered doorway. His gun was trained on Mirgon's chest.

"Get behind that desk, and act the part. You are unhurt, understand. When Ornill and his daughter are inside, dismiss the guard again. You'll only be saving their lives. We'll even let them off the ship so they won't be missed. One funny move and you live no more. Remember!"

As the two entered, Mirgon glanced once at Gard, and his eyes went weak as he saw the gun in Gard's hand.

"All right, men, I'll take care of your captives. You can return." He called through the door beyond which Callan could not see.

Callan's pulses were leaping and his head in a whirl. It could only be the presence of Vylara...but he had work to do.

"All right Mirgon. That's good. Now one more little job, and we'll get you a nice cozy cell in the ship's brig. Call the other ships of your force, send them out to scour the city for loot."

Wearily the pirate chief obeyed. For minutes he argued with his lieutenants, convincing them that there was plenty of time, that the city contained much of value that had been overlooked.

Callan watched the ship's slowly empty, in the screen, and sent his own released uniformed men, in the company of half his force, to take over the ships. Until they were inside, the uniformed men of the crew would be treated as prisoners. The plan was perfect, and within a short time their forces had captured the last strong vessel of the pirate force.

He had now some fifteen vessels under skilled space-hands, men who know how to fly a space-vessel.

THE BUSINESS of loading the women and children left alive in the now rapidly flooding city went on and on. The sky poured out rain as if someone had cut the very cords of Heaven above. Through water knee-deep the weary, fearful populace were loaded aboard the ships, and one by one they flamed up into the dark, lightning-barred sky.

At the last a good thousand men waited around the cruiser, and it was jammed already. The last ship on earth, and Callan knew as he watched the sky above, the fires of the now heated moon reaching even through the heavy storm clouds and making of the whole firmament a fiery maelstrom, knew as he listened to the scream of meteorites, watched the bursting plunge in fiery splendor like hail, heard them crash and flame over the doomed city of Cyclopolis, that he would never leave this planet alive.

He called for lots to be drawn. Too soon he found himself reaching into a tub of tickets, picking out a bit of paper. Each of them drew, and the favored entered. About Callan were some hundred doomed men, standing idly and watching the big cruiser tilt on its cradle, close ports in readiness—and flame off into the troubled face of the night.

Idly they stood now, looking into each other's faces, knowing it could not be long now. The waves beat about their waists. Callan knew that now very soon the first of the great girdle tides drawn up by the vast golden weight of doom above would race over Cyclopolis—would wipe out forever this city of the Cyclopeans on earth. Would tear out the



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mouths of the underworld, mounting the intramem, gliding along the strangely deserted underworld city streets.

Stopping at last before the laboratories of the Plastitech. Following into a scene of activity which to Gard was an ennobling glimpse of resourceful qualities of his mighty race.

Line after line of great translucent yellow blocks of amher plastic were moving along the vast conveyor belts, were being hollowed out swiftly by a huge drilling mech, were unloaded upon a platform by a crane.

Beside this waiting host of great blocks a line of medicos, in white tunics, passed along a line of men and women, waiting patiently.

Through Gard's mind shot realization. This was the project these people had remained for—he had heard of this years ago—this was the technique used for space voyages to the rims of the universe!

He had heard of the robot driven ships sent out by the plastitechs, empty of life. Empty of life they would remain for centuries, until at last the time had passed. Then within each cell of the living quarters of the ship a little heater would turn on automatically, gradually melt the low point plastic into a flowing yellow fluid and within each cell would be one Cyclopean colonist, waiting for life. Then within the cell a revivifying gas was released—breathing that—the human, dead for centuries of time—would again become as if he had but slept for a time.

This technique, evolved as a long range colonization and exploration device, was going to save their lives!

Wrappen in sleep, wrapped in the ponderous walls of six-foot thick plastic, no earth tremor could hurt, no cold could freeze, no water could

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drown the human so treated. Gard moved along, took his place in the line of people waiting for the hypodermic that would freeze his body into immobile apparent death—until its action was neutralized by the penetrative Vion gas-vapor.

It was a little frightening, to watch the people one by one collapse into the arms of the Meditechs, be lifted into the hollow space of the big plastic blocks, the warm stuff poured about their flesh from a huge ladle on the crane's arm.

Frightening, yet inspiring, the Meditechs were so utterly unperturbed, so sure of themselves and their suspended animation technique, so quick and sure in their movements.

Gard felt the sharp prick of the needle, felt the deadening fluid pour through his body in a flood of black lightning, saw the great steel and plastic chamber revolve on sudden pivots, and darkness claimed him.

GARD CALLAN woke as from a dreamless sleep. For a long time his eyes did not function, but his ears did. He could hear the low rumble of a voice he knew as . . . a friend. The quick bright tones of a woman's voice answered the low rumble of the man's. Idly Gard listened. . .

"Do you love this big courageous youngster, Vylara? You have been at your wit's end till today, when the salvage ships came in with the plastic blocks containing the survivors, people we had given up for dead. Now you are filled with delight, smiles, beauty—you are my own Vylara, the pride of old Terra."

"Oh father, who would have thought anyone could live through it all? Even inside those great solid blocks of plastic? The floods swept away every landmark, changed every land contour—and when the moon

struck—I thought my heart would break to see it scrape across the face of our loved home! I will never understand celestial mechanics! How can a thing as heavy as a moon fall to the surface of the earth and yet rebound as the moon did? I saw it, but I can't believe it!"

"Oh, they explain it easily enough. The fall gives the moon an added orbital impetus, and when it touches, the rebound gives it just enough more push so that centrifugal force picks it up again and whirls it out on a new orbit. It has happened before, on other planets. Some of the astronomers can tell you to the year when it will happen again to the earth, barring such accidents as atomic explosions."

"Do you think our Gard will be unaffected by his strange sleep? Is it possible that flesh can stop living, and then start up again just as before? In real death, the deterioration of the tissues begins at once!"

"The injection they give is a preservative which stops bacterial activity. When the Vion gas penetrates the tissues, the stuff becomes by chemical combination an innocuous material. They have practiced that technique for years, in long term colonization work. Your hero will be himself again..."

Gard Callan opened his eyes, looked up into the bright, expectant face of Vyara Ornil. Some strange glory made an aura around that face, it was more lovely than he remembered any face could be! He knew now, without question...forever that face would be in his heart. Weakly Gard Callan reached for her, and with a glad cry she bent and pressed her lips to his...

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plastic blocks containing the bodies of men and women, waiting still in the caverns of the cyclopeans under the U.S.A. Why were those never rescued? Why do they still await their deliverance that never comes? Who are they, what are they—these twenty foot giants sealed in amber blocks of unknown material, perfectly preserved as flesh is within such material—what were they placed there for?

Or were they one of the long term colonizing expeditions, shipwrecked on earth, taken into the caverns at some time in the past—set up as curiosities?

Or were they truly the members of the Cyclopeans here at the time of the moon's fall, (a matter of geologic and astronomic record, according to scientific authorities and was that the method of saving the lives of those unable to be evacuated, as this story has pictured?

They bear mute witness that the giant Elder race which abandoned earth long ago due to some impending catastrophe, was forever unable to return. Or were they all wiped out by that catastrophe, and only the bodies sealed in the plastic remain to tell what they really looked like?

From my own knowledge, I can say as a guess only that they are bodies taken from a space vessel that drifted into earth's gravity field by the latter dwellers in the caves. Who they were, how long they voyaged in their "little death" through uncharted space—who could say? Or how long they have awaited the rescue by their people.

But this story as I give it to you is one explanation of their presence, and it may very well be the true one. But if it is, among those bodies is also Gard Callan's, awaiting his Vy-lara Ornil still.

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The True Story of "Yellow Kid" Weil

**America's Master
Swindler . . . As Told to**

W. T. BRANNON

***Ace Writer of
True Detective Stories***



"Yellow Kid" Weil took more than \$8,000,000 from gamblers, business men, hangers, and un-
way strangers in the course of his amazing career.

You will gasp with disbelief as you read the in-
side details of his fantastic swindles, of his lavish
living, expensive cars and yachts, and beautiful
women.

The "Yellow Kid's" career began at the race
tracks, where his many ingenious schemes brought
him sizable sums from gullible bettors.

From this he progressed to elaborate set-ups
which involved fake money machines, bogus min-
ing stock, off-color real estate deals, and luxurious
gambling houses. He rented suites of offices and
even entire buildings, completely furnished, and
operated by moogers hired to impress his prospects.
At one time he operated both a bank and a hotel.
He was famous for the elaborate detail with which
his schemes were planned and carried out.

His favorite prey was the man who already had

plenty of money but wanted more. To such men
Weil would pose by turns as a banker, a mining
engineer, a famous author, or a wealthy broker.

His story is not doctored nor whitewashed. The
adventures of this master rogue are stranger than
any fiction, and they are set down just as they were
related to W. T. Brannon, famous writer of true
detective stories.

The "Yellow Kid" takes you behind the scenes
of the get-rich-quick confidence games. He reveals
how victims are found, how the build-up works,
and how the switch-off system keeps them from be-
coming suspicious.

This book will tip you off to the methods of
swindlers and, as Erle Stanley Gardner says, "It is
required reading for everyone who wants to keep
from being a sucker."

Buy "YELLOW KID" WEIL today at your
favorite book store, or send \$3.00 direct to the
publisher for your copy of this amazing book.

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